

THE DEVIL'S HOOFMARKS

SOURCE MATERIAL ON THE GREAT DEVON MYSTERY OF 1855

Edited by Mike Dash

The 'Devil's Hoofmarks', mysterious snow-prints appearing across Devon in February 1855, have been the subject of considerable speculation ever since Charles Fort revived modern interest in it in his *Book of the Damned* (1919). Mike Dash, contributing editor to *Fortean Times*, has spent many years collecting the original source material, the explanations and theories, presenting here a selection of original documents and an assessment of the evidence.

INTRODUCTION

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SOURCES AND THE EVIDENCE

On the night of 8-9 February 1855 (and on one or two nights thereafter [1]) trails, resembling those of a donkey, were laid across large areas of Devon. They appeared in shallow snow, between half an inch [2] and four inches deep [3], meandering through villages and gardens [4]. Sometimes, it was said, they did 'impossible' things, such as crossing roofs [5], leaping tall walls [6], disappearing through small holes in hedges [7], or stopping dead on one side of a haystack, leaving its sides and top undisturbed, and commencing abruptly once, more on the other side. [8]

The trail itself was equally mysterious. It was ubiquitous - there were villages where hardly a home had not been visited [9], and the marks were reported from more than 30 locations across the county, as well as one or two in Dorset [10]; if the tracks had been left by a single creature, it would have had to have travelled a distance variously estimated at between 40 [11] and 100 miles [12] in a single night. The marks, which were almost all four inches long by three broad or rather smaller [13], appeared to have been left by a biped, although the prints were almost always in a single file [14], rather than alternating to right and left as most tracks do. Sometimes the prints appeared cloven [15], sometimes not [16], and the stride was tiny, almost mincing, at between eight [17] and 16 inches. [18]

The circumstances were unusual. Devon, and indeed much of Britain, was in the grip of an especially severe winter, one so fierce that "the thermometer was one degree lower than

has ever before been known by the 'oldest inhabitant' [19]" and the rivers Exe and Teign froze over for part of their length, allowing games and on one occasion a feast to be held on the ice [20]. Snow fell heavily at about midnight on the night of 8-9 February [21], but towards dawn the temperature rose and there was rain [22]. The thermometer then fell once more, and there was a frost at dawn [23]. These are circumstances in which trails and footprints can be considerably distorted by the processes of thawing and refreezing, but one local source asserted that many tracks left by common animals remained easily identifiable in the morning [24], and on the whole it appears that a considerable majority of the inhabitants, most of whom were country people who might have been expected to be familiar with all manner of trails left by the local wildlife, were puzzled and in many cases scared by these tracks and by the places in which they were discovered.

The first traceable report of the mystery, which appeared on 13 February 1855, mentions that some locals were already inclined to ascribe the hoofmarks to a visit from the Devil [25]. The same article also gives the first of many less exotic solutions to the mystery, suggesting that the tracks may have been made by a monkey which had escaped from a menagerie; in coming weeks and years, it was variously proposed that the 'Devil's Hoofmarks' were made by the Great Bustard [26], heron [27], badger [28], mouse [29], rat [30], otter [31], swan [32], kangaroo [33], donkey [34], cat [35], wolf [36], and hare [37], or by flocks of birds. [38]

Within a few hours of the first discovery of the prints, a number of attempts were made to track down whatever had made them. A number of parties traced the prints for miles

139]; in Dawlish, an armed group of local tradesmen followed some tracks from the local churchyard to Luscombe, Dawlish-water and then Oaklands, a total distance of around five miles, without discovering anything material [40]. At Clyst St George, on the other side of the river Exe, two villagers following a trail through a field discovered four oblong globes of whitish excrement, the size of a large grape, alongside the tracks [41]. Others from the same area remarked on how the tracks had stopped and started suddenly, in the middle of fields [42] - as though they had been left by a bird, or something more mysterious, that had then taken wing.

Recollecting the events of 9 February from a distance of 40 years or more, several witnesses added further details, which might or might not be accurate. One heard how the hoofprints had been discovered to alternate, "at huge but regular intervals", with a mark like that left by the tip of a crutch-stick. The same gentleman was also spun a scary yarn about an attempt by a local hunt to corner the beast that had made the prints, which was cornered in a wood near Dawlish, but left unharmed by hounds that "came back baying and terrified" [43], (The Reverend Rowe, of Marychurch, retained a distinct recollection of the latter event [44].)

On the day that the trails were first discovered, several people had the idea of making tracings of the strange footmarks, which showed that broadly similar tracks had been left in a variety of locations. However, no one person, nor any group, tracked the mysterious prints for more than a few miles in order to see whether the trail was single or multiple, ascertain how varied were the footprints themselves, or to check the apparently reliable reports that they had been found in the most anomalous of situations. In the absence of this information, and in the presence of a proliferation of contradictory theories each based on the same scant evidence, it seems unlikely that the mystery of the Devil's Hoofmarks can now be solved.

The Sources

The primary sources for the story of the mysterious footprints are comparatively few, and those that remain are sometimes more or less direct copies of each

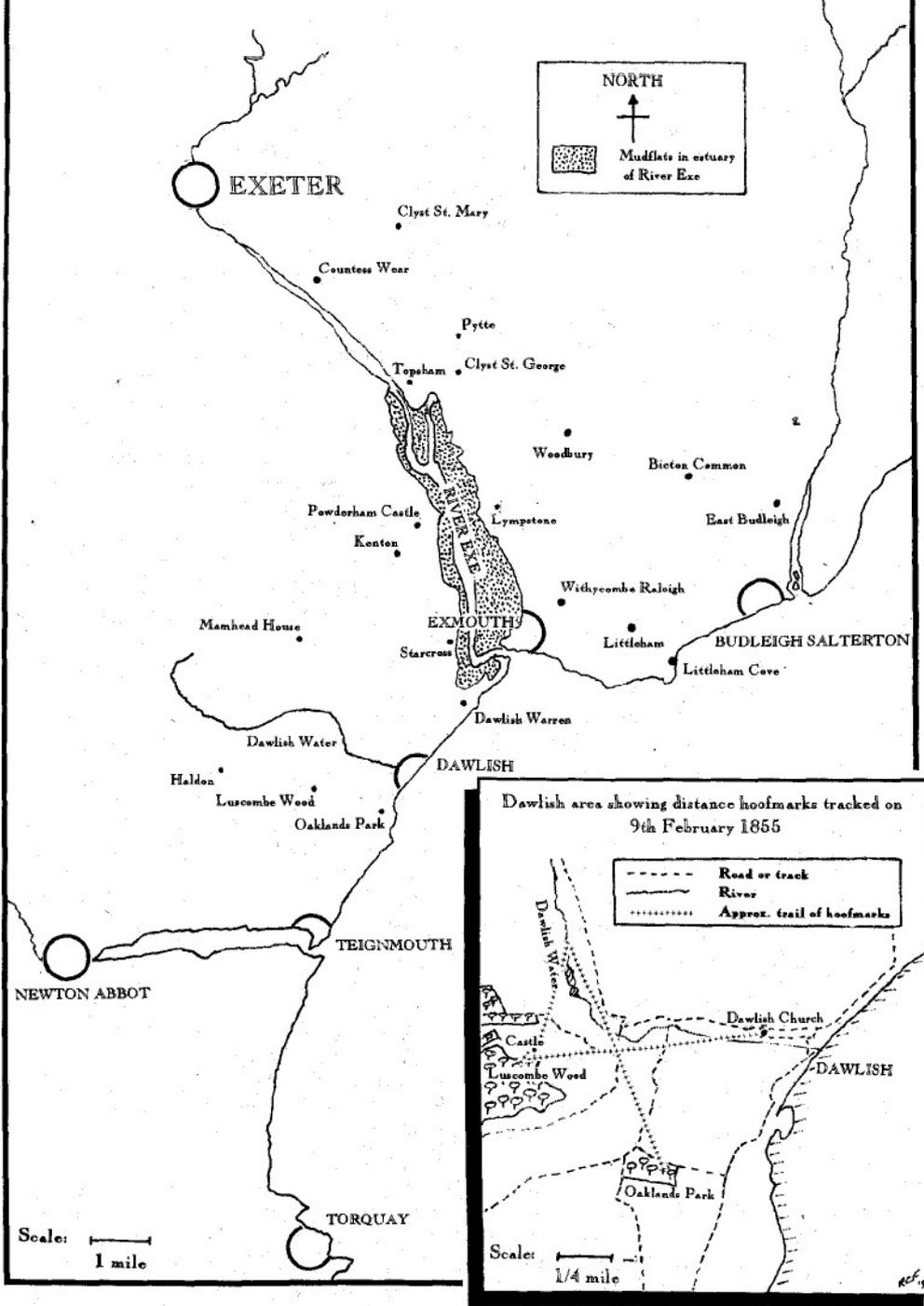
other. The most valuable evidence, contemporary manuscripts and letters from witnesses to the phenomenon, are scarcer still, though they are supplemented by perhaps inaccurate recollections set down many years later, and by local newspaper reports.

The only known surviving manuscripts dealing with the Devil's Hoofmarks are a collection of papers assembled by the Reverend H.T. Ellacombe, who was vicar of the parish of Clyst St George from 1850 until his death in 1885 [45]. They were kept in the parish box in the church. In 1952 the local historian Major Antony Gibbs, of Pytte, a hamlet close to Clyst St George, drew the papers to the attention of the folklorist Theo Brown, who printed extracts from them in the *Report & Transactions of the Devonshire Association* for 1952 [46]. The papers include a number of letters addressed to Ellacombe by friends, including the Reverend G.M. Musgrave of Withecombe Raleigh, the draft of a letter sent to the *Illustrated London News*, marked not for publication, and tracings of hoofmarks which, Brown concluded, were probably made on the spot. Included among them are references to tracks found in the outskirts of the city of Exeter - a 'furthest north' for the hoofmarks. Ellacombe also notes that the marks were similar in shape while 'varying some little in size', records the weather conditions on the night they were made, and notes that his dog was disturbed, and barked, during the hours of darkness.

Ellacombe was well-placed to observe the prints; a number were found in the grounds of his rectory. He spoke to some of the people who had attempted to track whatever had made them, and even obtained samples of the excrement found alongside the trail, which he forwarded, without receiving a reply, to the noted naturalist Richard Owen. The tracings preserved among the Ellacombe papers double the number of representations of the hoofmarks known to have survived, and include marks that the vicar believed were left by claws.

Equally valuable, perhaps, are a series of letters written to, and published by, the *Illustrated London News*. The first of these, by a correspondent signing himself 'South Devon', is certainly the most influential piece of evidence concerning the tracks. It forms the

DEVON IN FEBRUARY 1855
 showing locations where Devil's hoofmarks were reported



basis of almost all later accounts of the case, and features all the principle anomalies associated with the 'Devil's Hoofmarks'.

To begin with, 'South Devon' gives a list of some of the principle places where footmarks were discovered, including Torquay and Totnes, some way to the west - so far (six and 12 miles) from the principle scene of action that G.A. Household, a local historian whose useful booklet *The Devil's Footprints* [47] reprints a number of contemporary press accounts, queried the accuracy of the suggestion [48]. He was also responsible for putting into print the suggestion that the marks 'in every parish' were 'exactly the same size and the step the same length', two influential statements that are not, in fact, quite true. The writer, or his informants, also noted that the prints at one point appeared to have vaulted a 14-foot wall, and appeared on the roofs of houses. He dismissed the idea that thawing and refreezing could have distorted the marks, noting that other animal prints remained perfectly recognisable. Finally, he claimed that the marks formed a trail at least 100 miles in length, were in a straight line, and had at one point crossed the two-mile wide river Exe. Again, each of these latter assertions can be challenged.

Most later commentators, up to and including Rupert Gould [49], remained ignorant of 'South Devon's' identity. He appeared, on his own evidence, an experienced countryman with 'much experience in tracking wild animals and birds upon the snow', who had once spent five months hunting in the Canadian wilderness. Thanks to Theo Brown's rediscovery of the Ellacombe papers however, we now know that the author was 'young D'Urban' [50], 19 years old, of Newport House, Countess Wear.

D'Urban was evidently an able man - he later became the first curator of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum at Exeter [51] - and there is no reason to doubt that he had hunted and knew animal tracks. It is, nevertheless, reasonable to wonder how far youthful enthusiasm may have coloured his telling of events. Certainly his letter is quite dogmatic in rejecting possible explanations for the prints; equally, his drawing of the prints, showing a curving line of uncloven hoofmarks, is the least detailed, and least ambiguous, of all the

surviving sketches [52]. Another contemporary witness, the Reverend G.M. Musgrave, immediately wrote to the *ILN* to point out: 'The outline accompanying your intelligent Correspondent's recital of the circumstances hardly conveys a correct idea of the prints in question.' [53]

Musgrave's letter goes on to give a more detailed list of locations where the tracks had been reported and to set out his own observations on the phenomenon. He had been told, by a 'scientific acquaintance', of the discovery of the haystack through which the mysterious trail-maker appeared to have walked. He also recounts how he encouraged one congregation to whom he delivered a sermon to believe the explanation that the tracks were those of an escaped kangaroo - this became one of the most widely-circulated 'explanations' for the events of 8-9 February. But, as Musgrave admits, he himself had little faith in the theory and advanced it in preference to leaving his congregation to believe that the Devil had strolled through their parish.

The letter following Musgrave's in the *ILN* is anonymous, but it appears to have been written by a doctor living in Topsham [54]. He and a friend had closely examined tracks found in the neighbourhood and, having discerned the marks of claws, were inclined to believe that the trail had been left by an otter - this despite the fact that, as the author admitted, 'I am not familiar with the otter myself. In fact the suggestion appears to have been advanced principally to explain the men's important direct observation that the trail passed under low branches, and apparently through a 6" diameter pipe.

This, the evidence of two clergymen, a doctor and a young gentleman, is *all* the direct, first-hand evidence we have of the Devil's Hoofmarks. Of our remaining sources, the accounts published in the local press are at best compilations of what was being said of the marks in the area (Exeter) in which the papers were being published. There was, in the provincial press of the 1850s, little conception of what we today would call 'reporting'. Each title was run by a proprietor, perhaps alone apart from his printer, perhaps with a very minimal staff. There were few resources for news-gathering other than

conversation and the occasional letter from a correspondent 'on the spot'. The reports should therefore be treated with some caution. They are certainly valuable for indicating the main areas in which the hoofmarks were seen, and in giving an impression of the general consternation which their appearance caused. It should, however, be remembered that all their descriptions of the prints themselves are second-hand at best.

The story of the hoofmarks was carried by many papers throughout the UK, and no attempt has been made to scour the archives of the Newspaper Library at Colindale for any and all accounts. Nevertheless the rediscovery in the course of this research of two hitherto unknown reports from an Exeter paper called the *Western Luminary* [55], one of which is the earliest known record of the 'Devil's Hoofmarks' and the other of which confirms the previously doubtful existence of tracks in Newton Abbot, suggests it is not impossible that further important contemporary evidence could still be unearthed.

Not every eyewitness to the hoofmarks put their experiences into print in 1855. There was correspondence on the subject in *Notes & Queries* in 1890 [56] (by which time, evidently, the tracks had already been forgotten by many Devonians, and mythologised by others), and as late as 1922 further eyewitness accounts were still being published [57]. These later sources, though, need to be treated with caution. The passage of years is likely to have rendered them inaccurate and, as will be argued below, they contain many folkloric elements which have tended to add mystification to the mystery.

Finally, we have sources that tell of similar occurrences, and sources that seek to explain the 'Devil's Hoofmarks'. The former are vital to a proper understanding of the phenomenon, since they challenge the notion that the Great Devon Mystery is unique and, therefore, particularly mysterious. The latter are merely a selection from the many thousands of words that have subsequently been written upon the subject. We have had to restrict ourselves to extracts from the most influential or the best informed, and to passages setting out the main theories explaining the phenomenon of the hoofmarks. Very many accounts, particularly popular accounts, have been excluded.

But, since each is based (so far as it is accurate at all) on the evidence of the same four eyewitnesses, the same press accounts, and the same recollections, they rarely have much to add to the debate.

Anomalies Associated with the Devil's Hoofmarks

i | i he mystery of the 'Devil's Hoofmarks' ! is mainly concerned with the anomalies reported by their discoverers and by commentators on the case. But just how inexplicable were these peculiarities?

The ubiquity of the prints First, the marks were ubiquitous. They were 'vast' [58] in number; 'there was hardly a garden in Lymptone where these footprints were not observable, and in this parish he appears to have gamboled with inexpressible activity' [59]. In Dawlish, 'his footprints were traced through the greater part of the town' [60], and in other parts of the county prints were found in 'fields, gardens, roads, housetops, & other likely and unlikely places' [61]. In all, the tracks 'extended over a tract of country of 30 or 40 miles, probably more ... Now, when we consider the distance that must have been gone over to have left these marks - I may say in almost every garden, or doorstep, through the extensive woods of Luscombe, in enclosures and farms - the actual progress must have exceeded a hundred miles.' [62]

This, if executed in a single night, by a single animal, was certainly a feat worthy of the Devil himself. Indeed - as Rupert Gould pointed out - to cross even 40 miles, supposing steady progress and a generous 14 hours of darkness, with the generally-reported stride of around eight inches, would require the perpetrator to move at the rate of six steps per second [63]. But the supposition that the hoofmarks were the work of one creature is a dangerous one. The greatest distance we can say with confidence that a set of tracks was followed was about five miles - a long way, particularly if the marks were made by a field mouse or a small bird, but not an impossible journey for some animals to make in a night.

Several accounts make it clear that the trail was *not* continuous. H.T. Ellacombe wrote: 'At

Exmouth I have been informed by those that saw them there were marks in the middle of a field, insulated - without any apparent approach or retreat' [64] - while - also in Exmouth - one W. Courthope Forman recalled that 'the footprints came up the front garden to within a few feet of the house, stopped abruptly, and began again at the back within a few feet of the building' [65]. Some tracks, at least, did not lead into thin air; in Torquay, a gentleman followed a trail from his garden to a tree stump, under which he discovered 'a very large toad'. [66]

The length of time it took to lay the trail is also open to serious question. While it appears that the great majority of the tracks were first seen on the morning of 9 February, several accounts suggest that some were discovered at other times. The *Western Luminary*, writing perhaps three or four days afterwards, noted simply that the prints had been made 'since the recent snow storms' [67], while more explicitly the *Western Times* referred to the appearance, in Topsham, of tracks laid on 13 February. [68]

Prints found in anomalous locations

The alarming ubiquity of the Hoofmarks was not the most puzzling feature of the phenomenon. Their appearance in many bizarre and unlikely places aroused even greater comment. Prints were said to have appeared on a second-floor window sill [69J, in a garden guarded by a 14-foot wall [70], and, as we have seen, on either side of a foot-high hole in a hedge [71], of a drainpipe [72] and a haystack [73]. In addition, several reports refer to the appearance of tracks on rooftops. [74]

While these apparently well-attested reports [75] allow us to assert that a few of the main animal suspects - notably the donkey - could not have made *all* the prints, a surprising number of animals can climb well enough to have been responsible for the bizarre trails. These include cats, rats, and mice. Birds are even more obvious candidates, if one assumes that their feet could have iced up into horseshoe shapes.

Taken together, the reports of prints found in anomalous locations suggest that a very small animal - one small enough to enter a 6" pipe or pass through a foot-high hedge-hole -

made *some* of the prints. Alternatively, it is of course possible that these marks were made by human hoaxers anxious to make it appear that only a devil could have been responsible. The discovery - reported by the Reverend Musgrave - of prints which led to a haystack which had no marks on its surface, and commenced again on the other side, is perhaps the most difficult incident to explain using an animal hypothesis. However, we have it only at second hand and it is impossible to know how carefully the surface of the haystack was examined.

Indeed, the problem with assessing all the reports of prints found in strange places is a lack of full descriptions of their precise situation. It is not at all clear, for example, how carefully witnesses checked the alignment of hoofmarks leading to high walls with any trail found within them. It is therefore still possible that the marks found outside a wall were made by one animal and those discovered inside by another. Similarly, the suggestion that the trail crossed the river Exe and began again on the other side [76] is nowhere supported by evidence that anyone tracked the hoofmarks right to the shore on one bank and then located the point at which they emerged from the river on the other; on the contrary, the fact that no report mentions investigators following a trail across the iced-up river strongly suggests that no-one tried. All we can say with certainty is that hoofmarks were found on both sides of the Exe estuary.

The similarity of the prints Perhaps the most peculiar of all the mysteries associated with the Devil's Hoofmarks is the suggestion that prints found in many different locations were absolutely identical both in size and stride. The Reverend Musgrave, for example - on the evidence an exceedingly careful observer - wrote that he and a fellow-clergyman measured the distance between hoofmarks found in Withecombe Raleigh with a ruler, and 'the interval between each impression was found to be undeviatingly eight inches and a half. On the same day a mutual acquaintance ... measured the intervals between similar prints in his garden, above a mile and a half distant from the rectory, and found it to be exactly eight inches

and a half. This, in my opinion, is one of the most remarkable and confounding circumstances we have to deal with' [77]. In addition, 'South Devon' gives the measurements of the hoofmarks themselves as four inches by 2 3/4, and asserts that 'the foot-marks in every parish [were] exactly the same size and the step the same length. [78]

Unfortunately, most of the other surviving descriptions of the hoofmarks are not as precise as these. Where measurements are given, however, they often differ considerably, as the table of descriptions - see page 76 - shows. The prints themselves varied in size from 3 1/2" to 4" long and from 1 1/4" to 2 3/4" wide, and the stride from 8" to 16".

In my opinion, these variations strongly suggest that the great majority of the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by animals, rather than by human hoaxers for whom a uniform shape and stride would have been important. The difference in the reported size of the hoofmarks themselves further suggests that a number of different animals were responsible for the tracks.

Nevertheless, it still seems remarkable that the size of the prints should vary so little while the distance between them varied so much.

The sharpness of the prints

An associated puzzle, which attracted a fair amount of comment at the time, is the question of whether or not the marks really were those of hoofs.

Several of the more careful witnesses thought they saw the marks of claws within the prints [79], and one of Ellacombe's drawings shows them quite clearly. Richard Owen used these accounts to conclude that the 'hoofmarks' were actually the footprints of a badger [80]. Other authorities, such as 'South Devon' and *The Times*, assert the prints were clearly made and showed no sign of claws. [81]

Similarly, many of the footprints appeared whole - while others were cloven. There is some suspicion - supported by a comparison between the sketches made by 'South Devon' and the Reverend Musgrave - that on occasion the identification of cloven prints depended on the quality of the observer as much as the prints themselves, but other documents make

it fairly clear that in many places cloven marks were interspersed with perfect prints [82]. Again, this suggests that many of the prints were made by small animals - whether they were mice, squirrels or even badgers - either hopping or moving along with fore and hind legs held close together, the appearance of cloven prints marking spots where the left and right legs were placed slightly further apart. It may also be that a number of cloven prints were made whole by the process of thawing and refreezing.

The latter suggestion seems at odds with the curious insistence of several sources that the hoofmarks were astonishingly clearly cut. 'South Devon' noted: 'The most singular circumstance connected with [the mystery] was, that this particular mark removed the snow, wherever it appeared, clear, as if cut with a diamond or branded with a hot iron' [83], but he was not alone in making the observation. The businessman Mr Wilson [84], who found a similar trail on a Devon beach in 1950, told Eric Dingwall the prints 'were clearly impressed on the sand almost as if cut out by some sharp instrument', while Lynda Hanson's hoofmarks, appearing in a Humberside garden in the 1950s [85] were odd in that 'at the bottom of the print, dry concrete could be seen, not compressed snow as is normal when a person or animal treads on snow.' The significance of these peculiar observations remains obscure, though they certainly look anomalous; there seems no reason to assume that the witnesses were exaggerating, even unconsciously, for effect.

Finally, there is the matter of the 'un-deviating line'. Certainly later writers, such as CO. Burge and Manfri Wood [86] obtained the impression that the Devil's Hoofmarks followed a dead straight line across villages and fields, climbing any obstacles in their way. This is far from the truth; contemporaries reported meandering lines of prints criss-crossing gardens and churchyards [87]. The myth seems to have its origins in accounts which stress that individual hoofmarks appeared in a straight line, one directly in front of another. This greatly puzzled most observers, and led to the common observation that the footprints must have been made by a biped [88]. However, it is also possible that they were the work of small animals hopping

TABLE OF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE 'DEVIL'S HOOFMARKS'

<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>SIZE</i>	<i>SPACING</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>SOURCE & DATE</i>
Dawlish	c. 3½ x 2½"	12"	"like a donkey's hoof"	Western Luminary, 13 Feb 1855
Lympstone	1½-2½" wide	8"	"Closely resembled a donkey's shoe" Not cloven	Times, 16 Feb 1855
Not specified	1½-2½" wide	8-14"	"Closely resembled a donkey's shoe Not in a straight line, but track deviated not more than 6" on either side of a line."	Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, 17 Feb 1855
Dawlish	? x ?	16"	Some whole, some cloven	Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 17 Feb 1855
Exmouth	? x ?	9"		Western Times, 17 Feb 1855
Newton Abbot	? x ?	?	"About same size and shape as others"	Western Luminary, 20 Feb 1855
Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, etc			Cloven. Like a donkey's	Exeter Flying Post, 22 Feb 1855
Ditto	4 x 2.75"	8" "or more"	"The perfect impression of a donkey's hoof"	Illust'd London News, 24 Feb 1855
Witthcombe	? x ?	8½"	"undeviatingly, in two locations a mile and a half apart"	Illust'd London News, 3 Mar 1855
Near Witthcombe	? x ?	?	Claw or toe marks	Illust'd London News, 3 Mar 1855
Topsham	? x ?	?	Marks of toes and pads	Illust'd London News, 3 Mar 1855
Weymouth	? x ?	line	"Like cloven hoof of calf"	Notes & Queries, 25 Jan 1890
Dawlish			"In single file, in the shape of a small hoof [containing] marks of claws"	Devon & Cornwall N&Q, 1923
Clyst St George	Size varies		like a donkey shoe, sharply defined...single line..excrement found near tracks ... in one place tracks were double...dogs barked in night	Ellacombe papers, in Trans. Devonshire Assoc, 1952

with their/ feet held together, or indeed of larger creatures. The donkey, cat and fox, among other animals, can leave trails that look very much like a single line of tracks. [89]

It should also be pointed out that 'South Devon', again, stresses a point that other accounts do not support. Musgrave's drawings show a slight side-to-side variation (perhaps of the order of an inch or two) in some prints [90], while the *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* reported that the prints 'are alternate like the steps of a man, and would be included between two parallel lines six inches apart.' [91]

The reactions of animals Sherlock Holmes' 'dog that did not bark' was equally conspicuous on the night of 8-9 February. The thousands of hoofmarks that appeared during the night appear to have been made without alerting the local dogs, let alone their human masters. Only the Reverend Ellacombe [92] seems to have possessed a guard dog that barked in the night.

This absence of warning again seems to suggest a natural explanation for the mystery. Certainly domestic animals - particularly cats - are traditionally thought to be sensitive to the presence of the supernatural, while one would have expected the local dogs to react to an invasion of hundreds of gypsies. [93]

The only other report we have of animal reactions to the hoofmarks comes in a decidedly folkloric tale heard by R.H. Busk, who wrote of a hunt that set to pursuing a trail of Devil's marks 'till at last, in a wood, the hounds came back baying and terrified' [94]. If this is merely a tall tale, it had the backing of the Reverend J.J. Rowe of Marychurch (Torquay), who recalled: 'The episode of the hounds, &c, I well and distinctly remember.' [95]

An unexpected (and unreferenced) possible explanation for the above tale appears in John Godwin's *This Baffling World* [96], which tells how Daniel Plummer, the village idiot of Woodbury - a man given to 'decking himself in layers of chicken and goose feathers' and wandering through the woods making animal noises - was nearly lynched by a 30-strong hunting party from Topsham, which flushed him out of a thicket and then gave chase.

The Uniqueness of the Prints

When the inhabitants of Devon peeped from their doorways at the mysterious prints that had appeared during the night of 8-9 February, they appear to have been uniformly convinced that they were witnessing an unprecedented phenomenon. No-one - at least no-one known to the newspaper-writers and the correspondents of the London papers - had seen their like before, and this was a principle element of their mystery.

Yet, while the hoofmarks were undoubtedly unusual, they were far from unique. Twenty-one known cases bear comparison with the Great Devon Mystery, and it does not seem outlandish to suggest that hundreds, perhaps thousands, more are now lost or were never reported [97]. Taken together, these supplementary cases suggest a natural, rather than human or supernatural, explanation for the phenomenon.

Least useful are a number of brief, unreferenced asides likening the 1855 prints to poorly-remembered, second- or third-hand reports. Thus the *Western Times*, writing of the Devil's Hoofmarks [98], remarks: 'It is said a similar occurrence took place about five years ago', while the *Illustrated London News* [99] notes the tradition that a single line of regular hoofmarks, ascribed to the devil, appear annually on a hill in Galicia. These cases are of minimal value because they contain so little detail, or are reported on such doubtful authority, that it is impossible to tell how closely the prints resembled those found in Devon.

More interesting are accounts such as that from the *Inverness Courier* of 1 March 1855 [100], which show that cloven tracks apparently similar to those found in Devon were discovered in the snow elsewhere in Britain that same winter. (The Inverness tracks were said, on examination by a local naturalist, to be 'those of some animal, probably a hare or a polecat.') The *Daily Mail*, in 1922, printed a brief correspondence concerning tracks, ascribed to the devil, which had appeared on rooftops in both Norfolk and the Cotswolds in 1852-53 [101], and there is also an intriguing report, discovered by Fort in *The Times* of 14 March 1840 [102], which predates the Great Devon Mystery by 15 years but refers to

prints, resembling those of a pony, appearing in snow in several areas of the Highlands. On this occasion, however, the mystery prints do not appear to have followed the alarmingly regular patterns seen in Devon.

In the Black Country around Wolverhampton, in January 1855, cloven hoofmarks, similar to those of a deer, were found on the vertical walls and roofs of a number of pubs, starting with The Cross at Old Hill in Rowley Regis. Elizabeth Brown, landlady of The Lion pub, suggested a supernatural explanation for the mystery, telling a public meeting that 'her house was mainly frequented by quarrymen and the tracks were nothing new to them. Similar hoofmarks were to be seen burnt into the rock at Pearl Quarry, on Timmins Hill, and trails of them led from that place to the Hailstone.' Since the Rowley hoofmarks appeared nowhere but on the walls and roofs of pubs, however, it seems at least as likely that the Lion marks were made by local chapel 'ranters' who wanted to make a point about the pernicious effects of alcohol [103]. It is now impossible to say whether news of the Black Country hoofmarks reached Devon by early February - if they did, the case for human hoaxers would be considerably strengthened.

Strange hoofmarks are by no means an exclusively 19th century phenomenon. In 1957, Mrs Lynda Hanson of Hull saw footprints matching the dimensions and stride of the Devon prints in her Humberside back garden. They were cloven, four inches across, and spaced 12 inches apart. The prints were made in an inch of snow and, like some of the Devil's Hoofmarks, appeared exceptionally sharply defined. They stopped dead in the middle of the garden. [104]

Of even greater interest is the British Fortean Eric Frank Russell's careful account of some mystery prints discovered in the snow in Belgium during the closing days of World War II. The marks were somewhat smaller than those found in Devon, being 2¼ inches long by 1½ inches wide, but they ran for two miles in 'dead straight line', between nine and 15 inches apart. Russell was familiar with the details of the Great Devon Mystery and conceded that his prints 'weren't as dramatic as Gould's - they didn't hop across rooftops', but he still felt he had 'seen the

inexplicable'. [105]

Finally, and most mysterious of all, is the story told by the respected psychical researcher Eric Dingwall in the middle 1950s [106]. He had the details from a Mr Wilson who, on an October 1950 visit to the Devon seaside he remembered from boyhood, discovered a single line of hoofmarks leading from a deserted beach straight into the sea.

On this occasion the marks were of whole, not cloven, hoofs. They were six feet apart, and so deeply impressed in the sand that they were significantly deeper than the footprints left by Wilson himself, who weighed 16 stone. Like Mrs Hanson's prints, they appeared strangely cleanly made, 'as if each mark had been cut out of the sand with a flat iron,' yet a hoax appears unlikely, since the beach was locked and deserted, and Wilson had not announced his intention of visiting it to anyone.

Suppositions and Theories

What made the Devil's Hoofmarks? There is a short answer to this question, which is that we shall almost certainly never know. It is, nevertheless, possible to venture a few general comments.

Firstly, as both Rupert Gould and Theo Brown suspected, the cause of the prints was almost certainly multiple. There were simply too many prints, in too many locations, for any one entity - except, perhaps, Milton's Satan - to have made them. Nor, given the observed differences in the shape and spacing of the prints, and the dates on which they appeared, need we assume that all the marks were made by the same type of animal, the same mechanism, or the same group of human hoaxers.

Nevertheless, the considerable similarities between the various prints, and the existence of comparable reports from other areas, does seem to suggest that *most* of the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by a single type of animal, or group of humans.

Before summarising the main theories put forward to explain the marks, it may be worthwhile considering briefly the degree to which the special circumstances of February 1855 contributed to the mystery of the hoofmarks. The weather was certainly unusually

cold, though perhaps not unprecedentedly so - we are told it was so severe that flocks of birds were driven ashore in Norfolk, and they also appear to have been present in Devon [107]. Very few people, other than farmers, would have ventured out overnight, so the number of potential witnesses was limited. The ground was hard, and the duration of the cold snap could have driven even shy and nocturnal animals to travel considerable distances, and perhaps venture into villages and towns, in search of food. The long winter night may also have played a part, giving whatever laid the tracks that much longer to make them. And, of course, it had been snowing, so any tracks that did appear were far more apparent than they would normally have been [108]. In short there are good, natural reasons why the hoofmarks should have appeared, and been noticed, in the Devon winter rather than in summer.

Whether the thaw that occurred during the night of 8-9 February contributed to the mystery is more difficult to say. Certainly it is a suspicious circumstance, since it is well known that animal tracks that partially melt and are then refrozen can become considerably distorted. The anthropologist John Napier, in his work on Bigfoot and the Yeti, devotes considerable attention to the manner in which thawed bear or yak prints can be taken for those of an Abominable Snowman [109], and one of the very few witnesses who was out and about during the night in question commented on the peculiar way in which his cat's prints were turned into something very like hoofmarks by the thaw [110]. Against this we must set 'South Devon's' insistence that the trails left by men, cats, dogs, rabbits and birds were still clearly identifiable in the morning [111]. On balance, and taking into account my reservations about William D'Urban's reliability as a witness, I am inclined to think that the thaw and subsequent frost of 8-9 February may well have played a significant part in the appearance of the Devil's Hoofmarks.

The location of the prints can also give valuable clues as to what made them. In Lympstone, for example, the hoofmarks wandered up and down gardens and criss-crossed the whole town promiscuously [112]. This seems more typical of the behaviour of

animals foraging for food than it does of human hoaxers; why multiply the risk of discovery by leaving such a meandering trail, when a single line of footprints would have done at least as well? On the other hand, 'South Devon' notes that, to the north, 'this mysterious visitor generally only passed once down or across each garden or courtyard,' which, if true, sounds much more like the action of a hoaxer. Similarly, the prints found at Exmouth were noted 'particularly in many of the garden paths', an unproductive place for animals to search [113]. In Topsham the likelihood of human involvement in the mystery seems even greater; prints there appeared five days later than they did in other parts of the county, crossing the churchyard and leading 'to the very door of the vestibule' [114]. Theo Brown thought that this trail could have been made by Anglican loyalists making a point to the controversial Puseyite, or High Church, vicar of the parish, and she may well have been right. A similar preoccupation with the local church, however, was evident in Dawlish, where something or someone walked 'direct from the vicarage to the vestry door' [115] and 'left marks all over the churchyard and between the graves' [116]; Dawlish was not a Puseyite parish.

Anglicans

It would appear, then, that some at least of the Devil's Hoofmarks may have been left by low-church Anglicans out to make a point. The Topsham prints found on 13 February, as noted above, are particularly likely to have been made in this way.

The notion that the prints were hoaxed would have been strengthened had the marks really been as uniform as tradition suggests. Indeed, one would actually expect the marks in any one area to be identical, since they would presumably all have been made with the same implement. It is, however, possible, that the thaw distorted what were originally identical marks.

Human hoaxers anxious to make it appear that the devil had walked might well have gone to the effort of making a few marks on rooftops and leaving others leading up to haystacks or impossibly small holes in hedges. It is, however, hard to believe that low churchmen were responsible for all the prints

found on 9 February. There were so many that a conspiracy of dozens would have had to be involved - and why go to the effort of spending a freezing night out and about, laying trails across the countryside or through private gardens, to make a point about the local clergyman that could better be made in his own churchyard?

Badgers

It was Richard Owen, one of the great naturalists of the age, who first suggested the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by badgers, and the suggestion thus deserves a careful hearing.

In a letter to the *Illustrated London News* [117], Owen pointed out that badgers are nocturnal and known to venture considerable distances in search of food in winter. However, his choice of the badger as culprit appears to have been based on the fact that it is 'almost the only plantigrade [118] quadruped we have in this island', rather than on a positive identification of the Devon prints.

The theory was attacked by Rupert Gould, who had already tangled with Owen over the tetter's 'utterly childish' identification of the sea serpent seen from HMS *Daedalus* as a sea

lion [119]. A badger's paw prints are staggered, as it has rather a wide tread, and the result would be a double line of imprints, he wrote [120]. In addition, a badger could hardly have made the tracks seen on roof tops and probably could not have been responsible for those found in closed gardens.

Balloons

The idea that the Devil's Hoofmarks were left by a balloon does not appear to have been proposed at the time, but it has since attracted some support and the theory is, according to one astrologer, supported by the celestial alignment on the night in question. [121]

The suggestion is that the hoofmarks were made by a rope left dangling from a balloon as it passed slowly overhead. However, even supposing that a horseshoe-shaped grapnel had been attached to the rope, it seems unlikely in the extreme that such a random action would have left marks in almost-straight lines, let alone have left trails leading through pipes and hedges. And while at first glance the balloon theory could account for the tracks seen of roofs, it does not explain why no scuff marks from other trailing portions of the rope were found - nor indeed why anyone would have been so suicidal as to

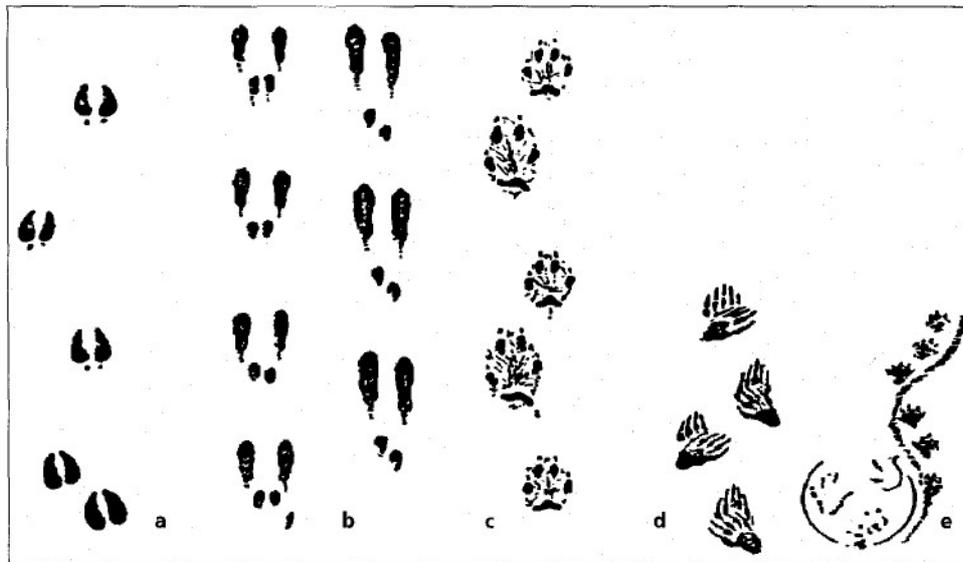


Fig. 1 - Known animal prints, for comparison with the 'Devil's Hoofmarks': (a) Whitetail deer; (b) Cottontail hare; (c) fox; (d) badger; (e) otter, with circular boundary marking.

be aloft in the middle of the night and in such immediate danger of being blown out to sea. Really it is a hypothesis that could only be advanced by someone largely ignorant of the complexity of the case.

Birds

At first glance the theory that birds made the Devil's Hoof marks appears to explain many of the anomalies of the case, and several different species have been suggested as culprits.

Certainly birds could have left trails on roofs, in walled gardens, and on either side of haystacks, and it also seems possible that some species could have proceeded along pipes and through small holes in hedges. We know that large flocks of sea birds were driven ashore by the severe weather, so it seems there might well have been enough animals of the same species around to leave many similar trails in different parts of the county.

The hypothesis seems to fall down, however, when the shape of the hoofmarks is compared to that a bird's foot, whether it be clawed or webbed. Proponents have had to suggest either that the animals' feet were swaddled in some sort of cloth [122] or that they were iced up [123]. Whether ice could have formed in hoof-like shapes on the feet of many different birds seems unlikely, and though there is at least one recorded instance of a flock of iced-up gulls leaving lines in the snow in their attempts to take off [124], the witness did not examine the resultant trails sufficiently closely to state whether they bore any resemblance to the Devil's Hoofmarks.

The observation that icing up made it difficult for the gulls to fly at all also counts against this otherwise attractive theory, although the Reverend H.T. Ellacombe did observe that some of the tracks were surrounded by flurries of snow that might have been made by the beatings of an iced-up bird's wings as it struggled to take off. [125]

Cats

Cats have not traditionally been linked to the hoofmarks, but the idea that domestic tabbies left the trails is supported by the only eyewitness we definitely know to have been out and about on the night of 8-9 February -

the tenant of Aller Farm in Dawlish. He noted that the thaw and rain which occurred during the night half-melted his cat's tracks, and then froze them 'into the shape of a small hoof, with still the impression of a cat's claws enclosed', and reported this observation to the Reverend Edward Fursdon, vicar of Dawlish. [126]

If the villages of Devon contained anything like the number of domestic cats that would nowadays be found in similarly-sized communities (and, given the great prevalence of rats and mice, there may well have been more), and if they were allowed out to wander, cat tracks may well have been responsible for many of the hoofprints, including those found on roofs. There must, however, be some doubt as to whether the actions of thawing and refreezing could have so uniformly turned the trail of any cat into that of a devil over five or more miles.

Donkeys and ponies

'Like a donkey's hoof [127]. 'Closely resembling a donkey's shoe' [128]. Many of the primary sources for the Great Devon Mystery draw attention to the considerable similarity between the Devil's Hoofmarks and the prints left by donkeys or ponies.

The general supposition at the time was that this resemblance was purely superficial and that the straight lines in which the tracks appeared meant they could only have been left by bipeds. However Theo Brown discovered in the course of her researches that 'donkeys are the only animals that plant their feet in an almost perfect single line' [129], which convinced her that a stray had probably left at least some of the tracks found in exposed locations. Needless to say, another explanation must be sought for the trails found in walled gardens and on roofs.

Gypsies

The suggestion that the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by entire tribes of Romany gypsies acting in concert has the great attraction that it seeks to explain the entire mystery, including the anomalous location of some of the tracks and the problem of how so many miles of similar prints could have been made in a single night.

The theory has only recently come to light,

having been first suggested by Manfri Wood in his autobiography *In the Life of a Romany Gypsy* (1973) [130]. According to Wood, the Devil's Hoofmarks were the result of at least 18 months of careful planning by seven Romany tribes who used more than 400 pairs of specially-made 'measure-stilts' fashioned from stepladders to leave the trail in an attempt to scare away rival tribes of Didekais and Pikies - pagans who were fervent believers in devils. The scheme depended on making it appear that the prints could not have been left by humans or animals, and as such special efforts were made to leave tracks in inaccessible and bizarre places.

We have a similar story from another source, one 'Graham', who wrote to the *Daily Mirror* in 1983 [131]. He was backed up by a 'travelling gentleman' named Danny Smith [132], but though neither refers to Wood's book their letters cannot be regarded as definite confirmation for the story.

It is certainly possible that between 400 and 500 gypsies *could* have left all the trails found in Devon, though they would have done well to have traversed so many gardens and roofs without being spotted. However, the Romany theory does have significant weaknesses.

Firstly, the traditions recorded by both Wood and 'Graham' do not accord to what actually happened on 8-9 February. Both place events in Somerset, and Wood, who is much more detailed, states that the hoofprints were made with 'size 27 boots', each with a stride of 9 feet. He also notes that 'the devil was supposed to walk right across Somerset in as straight a line as possible - he was not supposed to make any detour around houses or churches or barns or so on, but his footsteps had to go straight up one wall, over the roof and down the other wall.'

What happened in Devon was very different. The tracks often meandered wildly, and, as was observed above, there would seem to be little profit to a hoaxer in risking discovery by walking many times up and down a garden, particularly as the idea of a single undeviating line of tracks is so much more sinister. In addition, the prints that were made were much smaller than those that would be left by 'size 27 boots' and, crucially, often had a stride of only eight inches.

While it might be possible for gypsies to manufacture 'measure stilts' with a three yard stride, the idea of balancing a pair of stepladders while taking such tiny paces seems absurd.

Finally, there seems to be no tradition that the Romanies used similar methods to mark out other territories, even though similar tracks have been found elsewhere.

One possible confirmation for the gypsy theory was noted by a correspondent to *Notes & Queries* who wrote of the discovery of impressions 'of the point of a stick' left at huge but regular intervals alongside the hoofmarks themselves [133]. These, Ray Manners has suggested [134], may have been made by Romanies attempting to balance on their ladders. However, the *N&Q* reference is far from contemporary and there is no evidence from 1855 to back it up. In addition, the idea that the stick-marks were 'regular' does not accord with the theory that they were made by a gypsy occasionally in danger of overbalancing.

All in all it seems to me more likely that the Romanies appropriated the idea of the Devil's Walk to their traditions than that they were responsible for the event themselves.

Hares

The hare theory was suggested by a reporter from the *Inverness Courier*, who noted that tracks similar to those found in Devon had been traced up a hillside near the town and had been judged to have been produced by either a hare or a polecat. [135]

It certainly appears that the Scottish tracks were produced by an animal of some kind, but since the identification of the creature remains far from certain the hare theory is unproven.

Kangaroos, monkeys and wolves Perhaps the most unlikely of all the theories proposed as a solution to the Great Devon Mystery was the notion that the hoofmarks were made by a kangaroo. Though propounded from the pulpit by the Reverend G.M. Musgrave [136], there is almost nothing to be said in its favour. It seems that a pair of kangaroos were kept at a private menagerie in Exmouth, but there is nothing to suggest that either or both escaped. The absence of either

would surely have been noticed given the publicity accorded to the theory. Kangaroo prints do not resemble hoofmarks and the adult animal's tread considerably exceeds the maximum 16 inches attributed to the hoof-prints. In addition, even two kangaroos could hardly have left all the prints found on the morning of 9 February.

The sheer exoticism of the idea aside, the only apparent virtue of the kangaroo theory is that it might explain how some of the prints found in walled gardens came to be made. Even a kangaroo, though, might have trouble bounding a 14-foot wall.

Even less need be said about the suggestion that the marks were left by a monkey escaped from a travelling menagerie [137]. While an agile monkey might conceivably have clambered over walls and onto roofs, a single creature could not have left all the marks - and there is, again, no evidence that any animal had escaped from a menagerie, travelling or otherwise.

Still graver objections can be made to the idea that the trail was left by a wolf, since this animal has long been extinct in the UK. It is true that there have occasionally been modern sightings, but these are generally accompanied by reports of extensive depredations among local livestock.

Meteorological phenomena One of the most remarkable contributions to the lore of the Devil's Hoofmarks came from a Scotsman, J. Allan Rennie, who claimed to have found, on at least five separate occasions, tracks very similar to the Devon prints which had been made by a mysterious weather phenomenon. Once he actually witnessed them being made. [138]

Rennie's first encounter with the puzzle came in northern Canada in 1924, when he twice saw a line of tracks on a frozen lake. His companion on the first occasion, 'a French Canadian dog skinner', was so scared by the trail (which he attributed to the semi-mythical 'Windygo' [139]) that he deserted Rennie's expedition, while on the second occasion Rennie himself was terrified to see a line of tracks approach him, though no creature appeared to be making them.

'The tracks were being made within 50 yards of me - 20 - 10 - then, smack! I shouted

aloud as a large blob of water struck me in the face. I swung around, brushing the moisture from my eyes, and saw the tracks continuing across the lake.'

Rennie attributed the phenomenon to 'some freakish current of warm air, coming into contact with the very low temperature [which] had set up the condensation', and said he had seen similar trails in Kent, in 1939, and in Strathspey on 2 December 1952 and 9 January 1953. He took some photographs of the trails made on 2 December 1952, but these do not appear to have been published.

It is evident that this phenomenon could leave marks on roofs and in walled gardens, though it seems much less likely that it would form the sort of meandering tracks found in Lympstone. The chief drawback to Rennie's theory, though, is that he did not see tracks much like those found in Devon. The Canadian trails looked as though they had been made by snowshoes, while the Strathspey prints, though they appeared in a single straight line, were 19 inches by 14, and seven feet apart. 'In shape and size they have not always been uniform, varying from the bilobal to tracks which looked as though they had been made by a gigantic rabbit or mole/ Rennie wrote.

It would thus appear that the phenomenon is unlikely to have left the closely-spaced, regular trails found in Devon. In addition, we have the problem that Rennie himself is the only person to have claimed to have seen it [140] and that naturalist Maurice Burton, on consulting meteorologists, was told that it was 'impossible' for a known weather phenomenon to have produced such tracks. [141]

Otters

The otter theory appears to have been put forward principally to explain how a line of tracks could pass through a narrow pipe, but it does have the additional virtue of introducing an animal which, even in the 1850s, would not have been well-known to many countrymen. It might be possible for otters to be driven ashore from their frozen rivers in search of food, and every place where the footprints were seen was within half a mile or so of a stream or river. However, if otters *were* involved, it seems extremely unlikely they could have been responsible for all the prints,

particularly those that appeared in walled gardens and on roofs.

Rats and Mice

Thomas Fox, one of the many correspondents who wrote to the *Illustrated London News* in March 1855, appears to have been the first to suggest that the Devil's Hoof marks could have been made by rodents - specifically rats. [142]

Fox and his brother had found tracks in the latter's garden very like those described from Devon and - more than one hundred years later - similar trails were discovered in Epping Forest by the zoologist Alfred Leutscher, who subsequently delivered a lecture on the subject to the Zoological Society [143] and wrote up his theory for the journal *Animals*. [144]

A number of animals, Leutscher pointed out, including the hare, rabbit, squirrel and rat, are known to leave hopping tracks in which all four feet, held together, can form a pattern similar to a hoofmark. The effect can be enhanced if the marks are left in snow which melts and then refreezes. However, only one animal - the woodmouse - is small enough to leave the eight-inch tracks found in Devon, and its tracks, found in Epping Forest, closely resemble the Devil's Hoof marks.

There are, nevertheless, drawbacks to the rodent theory. Proponents have to explain why large numbers of mice or rats hopped such very long distances, rather than walking or scurrying about, thus leaving a more readily identifiable mixed trail. There must also be some doubt whether a single mouse or rat could really cover the distance of almost five miles (from Dawlish churchyard to Luscombe, Dawlishwater and then Oaklands [145]) which one party claimed to have traversed in following a single trail. And while it would seem possible for rodents to climb onto roofs, there seems no good reason why they should want to hop so singlemindedly over them. Finally, rats and mice are so common that one would expect trails similar to the Devon marks to be reported far more frequently than they actually are.

Toads

Toad-tracks were proposed as a solution to the Great Devon Mystery in the *Exeter Flying*

Post of 8 March [146] on the authority of a gentleman from Torquay who had followed a trail from his garden to a tree-stump, under which he discovered a large toad.

The drawbacks to the theory are that it does not appear adequately established that the toad in question made the trail, and that it is not quite certain that the Devil's Hoofmarks extended so far west as Torquay, which is six miles to the south-west of Newton Abbott. In addition, it would seem that a toad, with its webbed feet, would be unlikely to leave horseshoe-shaped tracks unless its prints were very considerably distorted.

UFOs

It would, frankly, be surprising if the Devil's Hoofmarks had never been linked to the UFO mystery, and indeed George Lyall, writing in *Flying Saucer Review* [147], suggests the prints may have been made by a laser beam used as some sort of measuring device by a flying saucer.

It is impossible to prove or disprove this kind of claim, though again it seems worth noting that the meandering, regular tracks found in parts of Devon do not sound as though they were produced in the manner suggested.

In any case, while the possibility of animal or human causes remains, the UFO theory can safely be put to one side.

Water monsters

Rupert Gould, a former naval officer with a particular interest in the mysteries of the sea, was the first to point out the proximity of the Devil's Hoofmarks to the sea, and to draw attention to the parallel Kerguelen case in which hoof-shaped tracks would also appear to have been left by something that came from the sea [148]. The same theory was also proposed by the ghost-hunter Elliott O'Donnell in his account of the mystery. [149]

The suggestion that an unknown sea animal made the Devon tracks is lent some support by the strange account given by Eric Dingwall's informant, 'Mr Wilson', who found a straight line of hoofmarks proceeding down an empty Devon beach and entering the water [150]. However, even Gould conceded that no known sea animal could have left the trails; nor is there any obvious reason

why such an animal should have evolved hoofs or wished to venture quite so far inland as the Devon tracks suggest.

Summary

No one theory entirely explains the appearance of the Devil's Hoofmarks and the apparently related tracks that have occasionally been seen elsewhere over the years.

While there is some reason to believe that a few of the tracks found in 1855 were made by humans, there is no good evidence to suggest that all were, nor can the proponents of the ingenious Romany theory explain either the close grouping of the prints or the appearance of similar trails in other parts of the country.

The meteorological theory, which also has something to recommend it, again fails to explain the extremely short distances between the hoofmarks. In addition, only one witness has ever claimed to have seen marks definitely attributable to a meteorological phenomenon, and the precise mechanism which allows the weather to produce a trail of markings is not at all understood.

On the other hand, it appears that the reservations of those who dismiss the various animal hypotheses may have been overstated. In particular, the variations in the exact shape of the prints, and the lack of evidence to support the popular idea that they were invariably found in a dead straight line, suggests that it is possible that the Devon prints were left by common quadrupeds.

The hoofmarks bore so close a resemblance to those made by donkeys and ponies

that it is surely possible that some trails were left by these animals. Many, however, cannot have been.

Only one other animal has been definitely shown to leave prints closely resembling the Devil's Hoofmarks in the snow, and that is the woodmouse. It therefore seems quite likely that a number of the prints found in 1855, including some of those seen on rooftops, were made by rodents. In addition, this theory can explain how the trail could lead through pipes and small holes in hedges or fences.

Presuming that the observations made in 1855 were accurate, however (which we can never now know), it would appear that even the woodmouse could not have left all the Devil's Hoofmarks. It is also difficult to see how the scurrings of such a common animal have failed to cause similar panics whenever hard winters occurred before or since. The mystery remains.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to the many people who have contributed towards this paper - to colleagues who have sent clippings to *Fortean Times* over the years, and, particularly, to those who have corresponded with us on the subject of the Devil's Hoofmarks themselves:

Paul Begg, Peter Christie, Collectors of Unusual Data - International, Penny Dash, R.G. Easter, Robert Forrest, Ray Manners, Bob Rickard, Peter Roberts, Doc Shiels, Karl Shuker, Caryl Sibbett, Bob Skinner, Paul Thomas, Paul Willis and Gerald Wood.

In addition, I owe a considerable debt to earlier researchers, particularly Theo Brown and Rupert Gould.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 - Document 8. | 15 - Documents 6,17. | 28 - Documents 11,16. |
| 2 - Document 7. | 16 - Document 3. | 29 - Document 45. |
| 3 - Document 3. | 17 - Documents 2, 7. | 30 - Document 14. |
| 4 - Document 2. | 18 - Document 6. | 31 - Document 11. |
| 5 - Documents 2, 11 | 19 - Document 3. | 32 - Document 39. |
| 6 - Documents 1, 2. | 20 - See <i>Western Times</i> , | 33 - Documents 2, 4, 5. |
| 7 - Document 11. | 17 February 1855. | 34 - Document 21. |
| 8 - <i>Ibid.</i> | 21 - Documents 2, 3, 7. | 35 - <i>Void</i> . |
| 9 - Documents 3, 7. | 22 - Documents 3, 21. | 36 - Document 3. |
| 10 - Document 17. | 23 - Documents 3, 25. | 37 - Document 29. |
| 11 - Document 39. | 24 - Document 7. | 38 - Document 34. |
| 12 - Document 7. | 25 - Document 1. | 39 - Documents 1, 3, 11. |
| 13 - See table of descriptions. | 26 - Document 11. | 40 - Document 3. |
| 14 - Document 23. | 27 - Documents 14,17, 23. | 41 - Document 23. |

- 42 - *Ibid.*
- 43 - Document 15.
- 44 - Document 17.
- 45 - Anon, *H.T. Ellacombe*, a pamphlet available to visitors to the parish church at Clyst St George.
- 46 - Document 23.
- 47 - G.A. Household, *The Devil's Footprints: the Great Devon Mystery of 1855*, Exeter 1985.
- 48 - *Ibid* p.II.
- 49 - Document 39.
- 50 - This is probably the William D'Urban mentioned in the pamphlet on the Rev Ellacombe (see note 45) as a friend of the vicar's. He lived to be 96 and left a daughter, with whom Theo Brown corresponded in 1951.
- 51 - Document 25.
- 52 - Document 7.
- 53 - Document 11.
- 54 - *Ibid.*
- 55 - Documents 1, 5.
- 56 - Documents 15-19.
- 57 - Documents 20-21.
- 58 - Document 2.
- 59 - *Ibid.*
- 60 - Document 3.
- 61 - Document 6.
- 62 - Document 7.
- 63 - Document 39.
- 64 - Document 23.
- 65 - Document 18.
- 66 - Document 13.
- 67 - Document 1.
- 68 - Document 8.
- 69 - Document 23.
- 70 - Document 7.
- 71 - Document 11.
- 72 - *Ibid.*
- 73 - *Ibid.*
- 74 - Documents 2, 3, 6, 7, 11.
- 75 - The *Exeter Flying Post* (Document 13) dismisses the idea that prints had appeared on roofs, but on no discernable authority.
- 76 - Documents 7, 22, 39.
- 77 - Document 11.
- 78 - Document 7.
- 79 - Documents 11, 23.
- 80 - Document 11.
- 81 - Documents 2, 7.
- 82 - Documents 2, 3, 6, 11.
- 83 - Document 7.
- 84 - Document 36.
- 85 - Document 37.
- 86 - Document 20, 46.
- 87 - Documents 2, 3.
- 88 - Documents 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8.
- 89 - Documents 11, 23.
- 90 - Document 11.
- 91 - Document 3.
- 92 - Document 23.
- 93 - Manfri Wood (Document 46) states that special parties of Romanies were charged with keeping any guard dogs quiet, but this does not seem to explain why animals kept indoors were also silent.
- 94 - Document 15.
- 95 - Document 17.
- 96 - John Godwin, *This Baffling World*, London 1971, p.42.
- 97 - Our data covers only the years 1840 to 1957, is significantly biased towards British cases (16 out of 21 reports) and is the result of a gradual compilation over 20 or so years rather than a sustained trawl through the archives.
- 98 - Document 4.
- 99 - Document 30.
- 100 - Document 29.
- 101 - Documents 31-32.
- 102 - Document 38.
- 103 - *Black Country Bugle*, nos 67 and 108, October 1977 and March 1981.
- 104 - Document 37.
- 105 - Documents 33 and 44.
- 106 - Document 36.
- 107 - Document 23.
- 108 - Of our database of 21 cases, no fewer than 14 concern prints found in snow, while one set of tracks appeared in sand and another case concerned prints discovered in snow and sand.
- 109 - John Napier, *Bigfoot*, Abacus 1972 pp.47-8, 106-07.
- 110 - Document 21.
- 111 - Document 7.
- 112 - Document 2.
- 113 - Document 4.
- 114 - Document 8.
- 115 - Document 21.
- 116 - Document 1.
- 117 - Document 11.
- 118 - An animal that walks on the soles of its feet.
- 119 - See his *The Case for the Sea Serpent*, London 1930 pp.108-120.
- 120 - Document 39.
- 121 - Document 47.
- 122 - A notion proposed by one W.W. in his *The Swan with the Silver Collar*. See Document 39.
- 123 - Document 34.
- 124 - Document 34.
- 125 - Documents 23 and 25.
- 126 - Document 21 - and see also Document 3 for a comment on this theory.
- 127 - Document 1.
- 128 - Document 2.
- 129 - Document 25.
- 130 - Document 46.
- 131 - Document 27.
- 132 - Document 28.
- 133 - Documents 15 and 38.
- 134 - Document 48.
- 135 - Document 29.
- 136 - Documents 2 and 11.
- 137 - Document 1.
- 138 - Documents 40 and 43. Rennie first wrote of his experiences in a letter to the *Glasgow Herald* published on 11 December 1951. Another letter from him on the same subject was published on 9 February 1953.
- 139 - In Canadian folklore, the windigo was the possessed body of an Algonkian indian. It preyed on men. Carole Carpenter, 'The cultural role of monsters in Canada', in *Manlike Monsters on Trial*, Vancouver 1990.
- 140 - Document 3.
- 141 - Document 43. However, Michael T. Shoemaker reports finding irregularly-spaced hoof-mark-shaped prints, apparently formed by falling blobs of water, in a layer of snow thinly covered with ice in Shenandoah National Park. *Fate* April 1986 p.128.
- 142 - Document 14.
- 143 - *Journal of Zoology* vol 148, 1966 p.381.
- 144 - Document 45.
- 145 - Document 3.
- 146 - Document 13.
- 147 - Lyall, George, 'Did a laser create the Devil's Footprints?', *Flying Saucer Review* vol 18 no 1, January/February 1972.
- 148 - Document 39.
- 149 - Elliott O'Donnell, *Great Sea Mysteries*, London 1929.
- 150 - Document 36.

TABLE OF LOCATIONS OF TRACKS

'DEVIL'S HOOFS'

SOURCE & DATE

Dawlish.....	Western Luminary, 13 Feb 1855
Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Dawlish. . .	Times, 16 Feb 1855
"Both sides of the River Exe"	Times, 16 Feb 1855
Exmouth, Littleham, Lympstone, Woodbury, Topsham, Starcross, Teignmouth, Dawlish-water, Oaklands	Exeter & Plymouth Gaz.ette 17 Feb 1855
Exmouth.....	Western Times, 17 Feb 1855
Newton Abbot.....	Western Luminary, 20 Feb 1855
Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Dawlish. . .	Exeter Flying Post, 22Feb 1855
Exmouth, Lympstone, Woodbury, Dawlish, Torquay, Totnes, Luscombe Woods.....	Illust'd London News, 24 Feb 1855
Topsham	Western Times, 24 Feb 1855
Mamhead, Starcross Tower, Powderham Castle, Kenton, Dawlish, Newton, Exmouth, Withecombe Raleigh, Lympstone, Woodbury, Topsham, Bicton, Budleigh . . .	Illust'd London News, 3 Mar 1855
Dawlish.....	Times, 6 March 1855
Exmouth, Weymouth.....	Notes & Queries, 25 Jan 1890
Bideford, Torrington.....	Devon & Cornwall N&Q, 1922-1923
Torquay, Barton, Walcombe, Dawlish.....	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1950
Clyst St George, Teignmouth, Exeter, Marley, Littleham Cove, Warren, Clyst St Mary, Haldon, Lympstone, Luscombe . . .	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1952
Teign Valley, Haldon, Powderham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Topsham.....	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1954
Dawlish, the Warren, Exmouth, East Budleigh.....	Manchester Guardian, 16 Mar 1955
Bolt Head, Watcombe, River Dart	Devon Ghosts, 1982

OTHER MYSTERIOUS TRAILS

Glenorchy, Glenlyon, Glenochay, Scotland.....	Times, 14 March 1840
Kerguelen, 1840.....	Oddities, 1929
Devon, c.1850.....	Western Times, 17 Feb 1855
Galicia, c.1850.....	Illust'd London News 17 Mar 1855
Cotswolds, c.1852.....	Daily Mail, Dec 1922
Inverness, Feb 1855.....	Inverness Courier, 1 March 1855
Old Hill, Black Country, 1855	Black Country Bugle, March 1981
From Dorset to Lincolnshire, c.1855	Devon Ghosts, 1982
From North to South Devon via Dartmoor, date uncertain .	Devon Ghosts, 1982
Lincolnshire, date uncertain	Notes & Queries, 25 Jan 1890
Unknown, 1870s.....	Devon & Cornwall N&Q, 1922
New Jersey, 1908.....	Tomorrow, Autumn 1987
Northern Canada, 1924.....	Chambers' Journal, 1953
High Weald, Kent, 1939.....	Chambers' Journal, 1953
Near Everberg, Belgium, 10 Jan 1945	Great World Mysteries, 1957
Devonshire coast, 1950.....	Tomorrow, Autumn 1957
Cromdale, Scotland, 2 Dec 1952.....	Chambers' Journal, 1953
Isle of Wight, 1954	Jour. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc, 1954
Ipplepen, Devon, 1955	Devon Ghosts, 1982
Hull, Humberside, Jan or Feb 1957	Daily Mirror, 7 Feb 1983

TABLE OF LOCATIONS OF TRACKS

'DEVIL'S HOOFS'

SOURCE & DATE

Dawlish.....	Western Luminary, 13 Feb 1855
Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Dawlish. . .	Times, 16 Feb 1855
"Both sides of the River Exe".....	Times, 16 Feb 1855
Exmouth, Littleham, Lympstone, Woodbury, Topsham, Starcross, Teignmouth, Dawlish-water, Oaklands	Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 17 Feb 1855
Exmouth.....	Western Times, 17 Feb 1855
Newton Abbot	Western Luminary, 20 Feb 1855
Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Dawlish. . .	Exeter Flying Post, 22Feb 1855
Exmouth, Lympstone, Woodbury, Dawlish, Torquay, Totnes, Luscombe Woods	Illust'd London News, 24 Feb 1855
Topsham	Western Times, 24 Feb 1855
Mamhead, Starcross Tower, Powderham Castle, Kenton, Dawlish, Newton, Exmouth, Withecombe Raleigh, Lympstone, Woodbury, Topsham, Bicton, Budleigh . . .	Illust'd London News, 3 Mar 1855
Dawlish.....	Times, 6 March 1855
Exmouth, Weymouth.....	Notes & Queries, 25 Jan 1890
Bideford, Torrington.....	Devon & Cornwall N&Q, 1922-1923
Torquay, Barton, Walcombe, Dawlish	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1950
Clyst St George, Teignmouth, Exeter, Marley, Littleham Cove, Warren, Clyst St Mary, Haldon, Lympstone, Luscombe . . .	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1952
Teign Valley, Haldon, Powderham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Topsham	Trans. Devonshire Assoc., 1954
Dawlish, the Warren, Exmouth, East Budleigh.....	Manchester Guardian, 16 Mar 1955
Bolt Head, Watcombe, River Dart.....	Devon Ghosts, 1982

OTHER MYSTERIOUS TRAILS

Glenorchy, Gleniyon, Glenochay, Scotland.....	Times, 14 March 1840
Kerguelen, 1840	Oddities, 1929
Devon, c.1850	Western Times, 17 Feb 1855
Galicia, c.1850.....	Illust'd London News 17 Mar 1855
Cotswolds, c.1852.....	Daily Mail, Dec 1922
Inverness, Feb 1855	Inverness Courier, 1 March 1855
Old Hill, Black Country, 1855.....	Black Country Bugle, March 1981
From Dorset to Lincolnshire, c.1855	Devon Ghosts, 1982
From North to South Devon via Dartmoor, date uncertain .	Devon Ghosts, 1982
Lincolnshire, date uncertain	Notes & Queries, 25 Jan 1890
Unknown, 1870s	Devon & Cornwall N&Q, 1922
New Jersey, 1908.....	Tomorrow, Autumn 1987
Northern Canada, 1924	Chambers' Journal, 1953
High Weald, Kent, 1939	Chambers' Journal, 1953
Near Everberg, Belgium, 10 Jan 1945	Great World Mysteries, 1957
Devonshire coast, 1950	Tomorrow, Autumn 1957
Cromdale, Scotland, 2 Dec 1952.....	Chambers' Journal, 1953
Isle of Wight, 1954	Jour. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc, 1954
Ipplepen, Devon, 1955.....	Devon Ghosts, 1982
Hull, Humberside, Jan or Feb 1957	Daily Mirror, 7 Feb 1983

CONTEMPORARY SOURCE MATERIALS

Document 1

The Western Luminary & Family Newspaper for Devon, Cornwall, Somerset & Dorset. 13 February 1855

DAWLISH. MYSTERIOUS. - Since the recent snow storms, some animal has left marks on the snow that have driven a great many inhabitants from their propriety, and caused an uproar of commotion among the inhabitants in general. The markings, to say the least about them, are very singular; the foot print, if foot print it be, is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 2 inches wide, exactly, in shape, like a donkey's hoof: the length of the stride is about a foot apart, very regular, and is evidently done by some two-footed animal. What renders the matter more difficult of solution is, that gardens with walls 12 feet high have been trodden over without any damage having been done to shrubs and walks [1]. The animal must evidently have jumped over the walls. It has also left marks all over the churchyard and between the graves [2]. Many parties have traced the prints for miles, but as yet, without any solution to the mystery. Several of the very superstitious draw long faces, and say it must be the marks of old ____: others conjecture that it must be some monkey which has escaped a travelling menagerie [3], with something on its feet; but all wish the enigma unravelled.

Document 2

The Times.
16 February 1855

EXTRAORDINARY OCCURRENCE. - Considerable sensation has been evoked in the towns of Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, and Dawlish, in the south of Devon, in consequence of the discovery of a vast number of foot-tracks of a most strange and mysterious description. The superstitious go so far as to believe that they are the marks of Satan himself; and that great excitement has been produced among all classes may be

judged from the fact that the subject has been descanted on from the pulpit.

It appears that on Thursday night last [4] there was a very heavy fall of snow in the neighbourhood of Exeter and the south of Devon. On the following morning the inhabitants of the above towns were surprised at discovering the footmarks of some strange and mysterious animal, endowed with the power of ubiquity, as the footprints were to be seen in all kinds of unaccountable places - on the tops of houses and narrow walls, in gardens and courtyards, enclosed by high walls and palings [5], as well as in open fields. There was hardly a garden in Lympstone where these footprints were not observable. The track appeared more like that of a biped than of a quadruped, and the steps were generally eight inches in advance of each other. The impression of the foot closely resembled that of a donkey's shoe, and measured from an inch and a half to (in some instances) two and half inches across. Here and there it appeared as if cloven, but in the generality of the steps the shoe was continuous, and from the snow in the centre remaining entire, merely showing the outer crest of the foot, it must have been convex. The creature seems to have approached the doors of several houses, and then to have retreated, but no-one has been able to discover the standing or resting point of this mysterious visitor. On Sunday last, the Rev. Mr Musgrave alluded to the subject in his sermon, and suggested the possibility of the footprints being those of a kangaroo [6]; but this could scarcely have been the case, as they were found on both sides of the estuary of the Exe [7]. At present it remains a mystery, and many superstitious people in the above towns are actually afraid to go outside their doors after night.

Document 3

Woolmer's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette.
Y7 February 1855.

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOT-PRINTS

To the Editor of the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette

SIR - Thursday night, the 8th of February, was marked by a heavy fall of snow, followed

by rain and boisterous wind from the east, and in the morning frost. The return of daylight revealed the ramblings of some most busy and mysterious animal endowed with the power of ubiquity, as its foot-prints were to be seen in all kinds of unaccountable places on the tops of houses, narrow walls, in gardens and court-yards enclosed by high walls and palings, as well as in the open fields [8]. The creature seems to have frolicked about through Exmouth, Littleham, Lympstone, Woodbury, Topsham, Starcross, Teignmouth, &c. &c. There is hardly a garden in Lympstone where his foot-prints are not observable, and in this parish he appears to have gamboled with inexpressible activity. Its track appears more like that of a biped than a quadruped, and the steps are generally eight inches in advance of each other, though in some cases twelve or fourteen, and are alternate like the steps of a man, and would be included between two parallel lines six inches apart. The impression of the foot closely resembles that of a donkey's shoe, and measures from an inch and a half to (in some cases) two inches and a half across, here and there appearing as if the foot was cleft, but in the generality of its steps the impression of the shoe was continuous and perfect; in the centre the snow remains entire, merely showing the outer crust of the foot, which, therefore, must have been convex. The creature seems to have advanced to the doors of several houses, and then to have retraced its steps, but no one is able to discern the starting or resting point of this mysterious visitor. Everyone is wondering, but no one is able to explain the mystery; the poor are full of superstition, and consider it little short of a visit from old Satan or some of his imps. On Sunday last [9] the Rev. Musgrave, of Exmouth, delivered one of his usual eloquent discourses in Lympstone Church, and in speaking of Satan as a tempter, who was continually besetting our path, though invisible, aptly alluded to this mysterious visitor who had left behind him visible evidence of his presence and expressed it as his opinion that the foot-prints were those of the kangaroo; but it must have been a busy animal indeed to have played up such pranks as this creature has done. I observed the impressions of my horse's foot made on the same night, and found they measured more

than six inches across, whereas the real measurement of the foot was four and a half. This, no doubt, arose from the foot-print forming a nidus for the rain, which, by thawing, expanded the foot to its exaggerated size [10]. I think it therefore difficult to arrive at the precise size of the animal's foot, which would, doubtless, be influenced by the same cause. What can the creature be? The kangaroo has claws four in number in the hind foot, and one of them peculiarly elongated. Surely the impression from this would not so exactly resemble the donkey's shoe. From its universality and vicinity to houses, is it possible that it may be the foot-print of the domestic cat, which always moves about at night? I think it very likely that the combined impression of a hind and fore foot in the thawing snow may have produced the mystery [11]. I merely offer this as a suggestion. If any of your numerous readers can throw any light upon the matter they will gratify the minds of many wondering people, and set at rest the perplexity of the timid and superstitious.

Yours, obediently,
Spectator

[same paper]

DAWLISH

The weather during the past week has been intensely cold, and on Sunday morning the thermometer was one degree lower than has ever before been known by the "oldest inhabitant"...

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOT-PRINTS. - Under this head our Dawlish readers will find in another column many curious particulars relating to the extraordinary footmarks which have caused so much excitement on both sides of the Exe.

In connection with the above "mysterious" occurrence, we have received the following particulars from our Dawlish correspondent: 'Considerable excitement has been caused among the inhabitants of this place since Friday last in consequence of a report that a strange animal, whether natural or supernatural is not known, had paid us a visit. His foot-prints were traced through the greater part of the town. They resembled somewhat those of a donkey, but, to add to the effect of the mystery, it was rumoured that in

some instances they were "cloven". So great was the excitement produced by the reports which got abroad that a party of tradesmen and others armed themselves with guns and bludgeons, and spent the greater part of the day in tracing the foot-prints. From the church-yard they proceeded to the grounds of Luscombe and Dawlishwater, and thence to Oaklands [12]. At length, after a long and weary search, they returned as wise as they set out. Some considered that the foot-prints were those of a large bird from a foreign shore, and others believed that they were those of a kangaroo or wolf, or some other beast escaped from a travelling menagerie. The greatest mystery was that in no place could there be traced more than two impressions, which were about sixteen inches apart. It will be remembered that we had a heavy fall of snow, about four inches deep, on the previous evening (Thursday), and that shortly after eleven o'clock the weather becoming a little milder, it changed into sleet and rain [13], and in the morning the ground was covered with a thin sheet of ice.'

Document 4

Western Times
17 February 1855

EXMOUTH. A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR. - On Friday morning last, this place was thrown into a state of alarm, in consequence of a report that the town and neighbourhood had been visited in the night by no less a person than His Satanic Majesty, and that the marks of his feet were distinctly to be seen imprinted on the snow, particularly in many of the garden paths [14]. In the course of the morning groups of persons were to be seen congregated together in parties of six and a dozen, all busily engaged in examining the marks. Whatever it might have been, it appeared to have two feet, and the foot steps were about nine inches apart. Some gave it as their opinion that they could not have been the Old Gentleman's foot-steps, as he was bound, the term not having expired when he was to be set at liberty [15]; others maintained that he was now enjoying his freedom, and could go where he liked and come where he pleased, but which of those were right there

was no means of deciding. Some said it must be a donkey, but he happens to have four feet, others that it was a bird which is only to be found in Australia [16]. The most puzzling part of it was no-one could see where this visitor had gone into the gardens, or where it had come out, the gate being locked during the night, and some of the walls being seven feet high. It is said a similar occurrence took place about five years ago. All we can say up to the present time is that it still appears a mystery, no one having been able to throw light upon the subject.

Document 5

Western Luminary & Family Newspaper for Devon, Cornwall, Somerset & Dorset. 20
February 1855

NEWTON ABBOT. THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS. - The mysterious foot-prints have been seen near this town as well as other places, during the past week, and some of the inhabitants appear quite astonished, while others appear to laugh at the matter. No one can think or tell what these foot-prints are. They appear to resemble those observed in other places, being about the same size and shape. [We have heard; but do not know whether it is the fact, that a kangaroo has escaped from some private menagerie, and is the author of the mysterious foot-prints. We rather suspect that it is the result of natural causes. Ed. W.L.] [17]

Document 6

Trewman's Exeter Flying Post. 22
February 1855

"MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS." - An excitement worthy of the dark ages has prevailed in Topsham, Lympstone, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Dawlish, and, for ought we know to the contrary, in many other places, caused by "foot-tracks of a most strange and mysterious description," as the local penny-aliners to the London papers have described them. These are to be found in fields, gardens, roads, house-tops, & other likely and unlikely places, deeply embedded in snow. The shape was a hoof, and as the Devil is supposed to

have a cloven foot, why of course the impressions were Satanic, at least this was the suggestion of the intelligent mind who does the correspondence for the *Times*. It happens, however, that *both* foot-tracks are cloven, so that old Harry must have disguised his sound foot to escape detection [18], although, singularly enough, according to "our own correspondent," the steps he took to elude the vigilance of the police have led to his discovery. The following is the account sent to the *Times*: ... [19]

We can't pretend to give an explanation of this "mysterious affair", but all we know is that if this Devil has taken it into his head to have a steeple chase in Devon, he has manifested very peculiar taste in choosing such an inclement season for his sport.

Document 7

The Illustrated London News,
24 February 1855

**FOOT-MARKS ON THE SNOW IN
DEVON (From a Correspondent) [20]**

As many of your readers have perused, I have no doubt, with much interest, the paragraph which appeared in several of the papers last week relative to the mysterious foot-marks left upon the snow during the night of Thursday, the 8th, in the parishes of Exmouth, Lypmstone, and Woodbury, as also in Dawlish, Torquay, Totnes, and other places on the other side of the estuary of the Exe, in the county of Devon, extending over a tract of country of thirty or forty miles, or probably more; and as the paragraph I allude to does not fully detail the mysterious affair, it may probably be interesting to many to have a more particular account - which I think this unusual occurrence well deserves.

The marks which appeared on the snow (which lay very thinly on the ground at the time), and which were seen on the Friday morning, to all appearance were the perfect impression of a donkey's hoof - the length four inches by two and three-quarter inches; but, instead of progressing as the animal would have done (or indeed as any other would have done), feet right and left, it appeared that foot had followed foot in *single line*, the distance from each tread being eight

inches or rather more - the foot-marks in every parish being exactly the same size and the step the same length [21]. This mysterious visitor generally only passed *once* down or across each garden or courtyard and did so in nearly all the houses in many parts of the several towns above mentioned, as also in the farms scattered about; this regular track passing in some instances over the roofs of houses, and hayricks, and very high walls (one fourteen feet), without displacing the snow on either side or altering the distance between the feet, and passing on as if the wall had not been any impediment. The gardens with high fences and walls, and gates locked, were equally visited as those unprotected. Now, when we consider the distance that must have been gone over to have left these marks - I may say

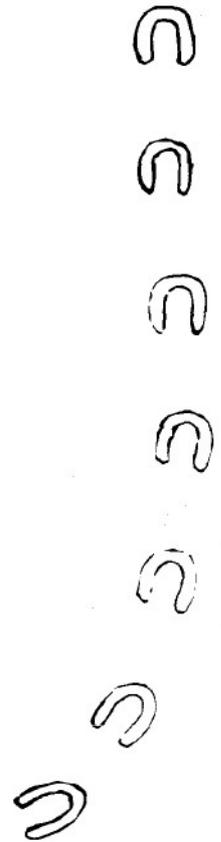


Fig. 2 - Drawing of the Hoofmarks accompanying 'South Devon's' letter to the *Illustrated London News*, 24 February 1855. (Document 7.)

in almost every garden, or doorstep, through the extensive woods of Luscombe, upon commons, in enclosures and farms - the actual progress must have exceeded a hundred miles. It is very easy for people to laugh at these appearances, and account for them in an idle way. At present no satisfactory solution has been given. No known animal could have traversed this extent of country in one night, besides having to cross an estuary of the sea two miles broad. Neither does any known animal walk in a *line* of single footsteps, not even man. [22]

Birds could not have left these marks, as no bird's foot leaves the impression of a hoof, or, even were there a bird capable of doing so, could it proceed in the direct manner above stated - nor would birds, even if they had donkeys' feet, confine themselves to one direct line, but hop here and there, but the nature of the mark at once sets aside its being the track of a bird. The effect of the atmosphere upon these marks is given by many as a solution, but how could it be possible for the atmosphere to affect one impression and not affect another? On the morning that the above was observed the snow bore the fresh marks of cats, dogs, rabbits, birds, and men clearly defined. Why, then, should a continuous track, far more clearly defined - so clearly, even, that the raising in the centre of the frog [23] of the foot could be plainly seen - why then should this particular mark be the only one which was affected by the atmosphere, and all the others left as they were? Besides, the most singular circumstance connected with it was, that this particular mark removed the snow, wherever it appeared, clear, as if cut with a diamond or branded with a hot iron; of course I am not alluding to its appearance after having been trampled on, or meddled with by the curious in and about the thoroughfares of the towns. In one instance this track entered a covered shed, and passed through it out of a broken part of the wall at the other end, where the atmosphere could not affect it.

The writer of the above has passed a five months' winter in the backwoods of Canada, and has had much experience in tracking wild animals and birds upon the snow, and can safely say, he has never seen a more clearly-defined track, or one that appeared to be less

altered by the atmosphere than the one in question. Marks left upon thin snow especially may after a time blur a little, but never lose their distinctive character, as every one will know who has been accustomed to follow the track of the American partridge.

Should you think the above likely to interest your readers, or draw from any of them a better solution of this most singular occurrence than has at present been given, perhaps you will allow it a place in your most interesting journal. I send you a copy of the foot [24], taken from the snow, and also a succession of the steps, to show you the manner of progressing. *South Devon*

Document 8

Western Times.

24 February 1855

TOPSHAM. THE TWO-LEGGED WONDER. - The same excitement prevails here as at Exmouth and other places relative to the "Satanic Hoof". The track has been seen here in great perfection, and some people say it was sent as a warning to the Puseyites [25] - hence it is that the "phenomenon" has visited the Puseyite parishes of Woodbury, Topsham, and Littleham-cum-Exmouth [26]. In this place it has traversed the churchyard - and even to the very door of the vestibule. The "sombre perpetual" [27] has not, it is said, exhibited a pleasant countenance since the occurrence. Its first appearance here was on the eve of Saint Valentine. [28]

Document 9

Brighton Guardian. 28

February 1855

Letters to the Editor

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTSTEPS IN DEVON

SIR - Is it not possible - nay, probable - that these are the footsteps of that animal so accurately described by Biom Heriolfson, the Icelandic navigator, who visited the coasts of Labrador, A.D. 1001, and to whom, with Lief, Baron Humboldt, in his "Cosmos," [29] attributes the discovery of America? The

records of this event are both numerous and authentic, and have received ample confirmation from the researches of Rafn, the greatest Northern scholar of our times. Biom Heriolfson describes an animal, which he terms the Unipede, or Uniped, as having a foot similar to that represented by the copy given in the *Illustrated London News*, with the exception of an almost imperceptible division in the outer and inner circles of the hoof. The character of the limb was, in his opinion, a stranger phenomenon than its singleness, for it partook rather of that of a quadruped than of that of a bird. He informs us that the wings appeared to radiate from the middle of the back with the feathers spreading out in a manner similar to those in the tail of a peacock; but they were slightly divided into two equal parts when the bird was in motion. Moreover, the uniped had the power, when alarmed or excited, of erecting a single crest of feathers above the head so peculiar and striking that an opinion prevailed among the learned of Iceland that this animal was the unicorn, hitherto considered fabulous. Let it be remembered that the inhabitants of Iceland, during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, created and maintained, amidst its snows and volcanic fires, a literature which would have honoured the happiest climes of Europe. Biom Heriolfson, in completing his description of the uniped, states that the organs of vision approximated so closely that they had the appearance of a double eye. This bird, he affirms, flew, or rather ran, with incredible swiftness, touching the ground frequently and at equal distances. Thus the footsteps would be in a direct line.

The cry or note of this animal was something hideous, unlike that of any other bird or beast. The learned Gardner [30] in a late edition of his great work on the music of nature would seem to imply that Wagner, Schumann and other celebrities of the modern German school have borrowed their notions of music from the peculiar tones of the uniped; but, Sir, I entirely dissent from their opinion, as these masters have repudiated any such association by affixing Dueped [31] to their compositions.

In conclusion, your readers may rest assured that the dimension of the *tail* of the uniped is just one half of a great dodo.

S.K.E.

North-street, Brighton, February 26th

Document 10

Trewman's Exeter Flying Post. 1
March 1855

A GHOSTLY VISITOR. - The mysterious foot-marks which have so puzzled the people of Exmouth have been likewise traced at Woodbury; and, as these foot-prints first appeared in the morning snow, after a most bitter freezing night, the farmers have little doubt that the impressions must have been made by the tread of a warm footstep - which inclines them to think that the ghost of St Wenceslas is troubling them because they would not sing his saintship's glory and honour in the parish church [32]. There are some persons, however, who supposed the mysterious footprints to give evidence of the cloven hoof, and they wished the patron of the parish, Mr Custos Corfe, to be consulted, as they thought, with his experience in Puseyism, he might know something of the measure of a cloven foot. The more knowing ones, however, still cleave to the Wenceslas hypothesis, deeming it unreasonable to suppose that Satan would disturb a state of things that empties the church and keeps ill-feeling and discord constant residents in the once united parish of Woodbury.

Document 11

Illustrated London News. 3
March 1855

PROFESSOR OWEN ON THE FOOT-MARKS IN THE SNOW IN DEVON [33]

(To the editor of the *Illustrated London News*)

An esteemed zoological friend has submitted to me a carefully-executed drawing of one of the more perfect impressions left in the snow at Luscombe, South Devon, on or about the 8th of last month. It was of the hind-foot of a Badger. This is almost the only plantigrade quadruped we have in this island, and leaves a foot-print larger than would be supposed from its size. The Sketch, of which you have given a Cut in p.187 (Feb.24th), gives a correct

general idea of the shape and proportions of these footprints, but without the indications of the pad on the sole, and the five small claws, which the drawing sent to me exhibited. Such perfect foot-prints were rare, because those of the fore and hind-foot are commonly more or less blended together, producing the appearance of a line of single footsteps; which appearance, if a bear had been abroad in the five winter months spent by your Correspondent in Canada, would have shown him was not peculiar to the foot-steps of man, but characteristic of other plantigrade mammalia, though they may be quadrupedal. The badger sleeps a good deal in his winter retreat, but does not hibernate so regularly and completely as the bear does in the severer climate of Canada. The badger is nocturnal, and comes abroad occasionally in the late winter, when hard-pressed by cold and hunger; it is a stealthy prowler, and most active and enduring in its quest of food.

That one and the same animal should have gone over 100 miles of a most devious and irregular route in one night is as improbable as that one badger only should have been awake and hungry out of the number concealed in the 100 miles of rocky and bosky [34] Devonshire which has been startled by the impressions revealed by the rarely-spread carpet of snow in that beautiful county.

The onus of the proof that one creature made them in one night rests with the assertor, who ought to have gone over the same ground, with a power of acute and unbiassed observation, which seems not to have been exercised by him who failed to distinguish the truly single from the blended foot-prints in question.

Nothing seems more difficult than to see a thing as it really is, unless it be the right interpretation of observed phenomena.

Richard Owen

We have likewise received communications upon the above subject from A.B.P., Ipswich; A CONSTANT READER, Burgh; A.A.; I.S., Jersey; K.L.M., Clifton. W.W., Somerset, will perhaps state the authority for the statement of the strayed swan [35]. The following are ingenious attempts to explain this remarkable appearance:-

I have read with great interest the paragraph in your last publication giving an account of the most extraordinary prints in the snow, which have occasioned such excitement and fomented so melancholy a mass of superstitious folly in the villages lying southward of Exeter, on either side of the river Exe. Permit me, however, to state that the outline accompanying your intelligent Correspondent's recital of the circumstances hardly conveys a correct idea of the prints in question. As an amateur accustomed to make most accurate drawings from nature, I set to work soon after these marks appeared and completed the accompanying exact fac-simile of those that were visible on the lawn of our clergyman's garden in this parish [36]. He and I traced them through a low privet hedge, by a circular opening of one foot diameter. On applying a rule, the interval between each impression was found to be undeviatingly eight inches and a half. On the same day a mutual acquaintance, familiar with natural history, and not long since returned from the Pacific Ocean, measured the intervals between similar prints in his garden, above a mile and a half distant from the Rectory, and found it to be exactly eight inches and a half. This, in my opinion, is one of the most remarkable and confounding circumstances we have to deal with. In the course of a few days a report was circulated that a couple of kangaroos had got loose from a private menagerie (Mr. Fische's, I believe) at Sidmouth. Few of us had had opportunities of seeing the impression made on sand or loam, by the hinder feet, or hocks rather, on which this animal sits; and we were not unwilling to give credence to the suggestion that the exotic quadruped (walking, when it does walk, as a biped; but bounding over vast lengths of space more like a chamois) might have been loose and vagrant in the neighbourhood, and left the strange impress here referred to. Still, it was quite inexplicable that the animal, considering the scale of the foot, should leave, in single file, one print only, and, as has been already observed, with intervals as exactly preserved as if the prints had been made by a drill, or any other mechanical frame. A scientific acquaintance informed me of his having traced the same prints across a field up to a hay-stack. The surface of the stack was wholly free from

marks of any kind, but on the opposite side of the stack, in a direction exactly corresponding with the track thus traced, the prints began again! [37] The same fact has been ascertained in respect of a wall intervening.

No animal with cushion paw, such as the feline tribe - diminutive or large (cat or tiger) - exhibit, could have made these marks; for the feet of most quadrupeds tread in parallel lines, some widely divaricated, others approximating very closely. The ass, especially, among the animals daily seen, approaches the single line. The fox leaves round dots in a single line; the stoat two and one alternately. Moreover, the feline tribe leave concave prints; whereas, in each of these mystical prints, the space enclosed by the bordering line was convex, as in the print of a patten.

Early in the week we were informed that two cranes had been shot at Otterton, below Budleigh Salterton, and that these were the mystical printers; but the well informed in zoology at once rejected this offered explanation [38]. Within the last four-and-twenty hours, a very shrewd and intellectual neighbour of mine, about six miles distant, wrote me word that a gentleman in the parish adjoining his own had traced these peculiar prints through his garden-walks into a six-inch gutter, and there he saw the marks of *claws*. This has induced some to suppose them to be the track of a catamountain [39]. Two other gentlemen, resident in the same parish, pursued a line of prints during three hours and a half, marking their progress under gooseberry-bushes and espalier fruit-trees; and then, missing them, regained sight of the impression on the roofs of some houses to which their march of investigation brought them. These gentlemen "swear to claws." Upon which my correspondent (a member of the Society of Antiquaries) observes, "We incline to believe they must be otters, driven out in quest of food [40]. Our friend felt toemarks at the contracted part of the print, though they were not discernible by the eye."

Some "chiel amang" [41] the congregation where I was discoursing three Sundays since had evidently been "taking notes, and, faith! he presented them" (as Burns would say); and though, without incurring the charge of the slightest approach to irreverence, I found a very apt opportunity to mention the name of

kangaroo, in allusion to the report then current. I certainly did not pin my faith to that version of the mystery, nor call upon others to receive it *ex cathedra* [42]; but the state of the public mind of the villagers, the labourers, their wives and children, and old crones, and trembling old men, dreading to stir out after sunset, or to go out half a mile into lanes or by-ways, on a call or message, under the conviction that this was the Devil's walk, and none other, and that it was wicked to trifle with such a manifest proof of the Great Enemy's immediate presence, rendered it very desirable that a turn should be given to such a degrading and vitiated notion of a superintending Divine Providence; and I was thankful that a kangaroo was "in the wind," as we should say, and serving to disperse ideas so derogatory to a christianised, but assuredly most unenlightened, community. I was reminded, nevertheless, by one pertinacious recusant, that it is written that Satan should be unchained for a thousand years, and that the latter days are at hand. Still, mine was a word in due season, and did good.

The generality of such of us as can reason dispassionately on view of a phenomenon which seems, as yet, to be without precedent or parallel, incline to believe it must be a bird of some unfamiliar tribe, wandering and hopping over this region; but all inquiry seems to be fruitless. I have addressed communications to the British Museum, to the Zoological Society to the keepers of birds and beasts in the Regent's Park menagerie; and the universal reply is, they are utterly unable to form any conjective on the subject, however correctly the impressions had been copied.

I am emboldened to address you with more than the ordinary confidence of a correspondent "well up on his facts" inasmuch as I am living in the centre of the district where the alarm, so to speak, was first given. Sir L. Newman's Park, at Mamhead, is exactly opposite to my own residence. Starcross Tower is an object of the picturesque, and beautiful to gaze upon from my study window; and Powderham Castle gleams in the sunshine, half a mile further up. These are on the other side (west) of the river Exe, two miles in its breadth; and the marks were as abundant throughout the places just specified,

and their neighbourhood - Kenton, Dawlish, Newton, &c - as here at Exmouth, Withcombe Raleigh, Lypstone, Woodbury, Topsham, and the vicinity of Bicton, and Budleigh. There are many "travelled men," and deep thinkers too, among us, far from being

Credulous to false prints

(as *Isabella* says to *Angelo*) [43]; but - eager as we are to ascertain the exact point of knowledge in natural history at which the elucidation of this unprecedented mystery might commence - our anxiety as zoologists, or as students or connoisseurs in any one of the sciences, is a feeling of apathetic indifference in comparison with our regret for the prevalence and evil working of that gross and incredible superstition which is raging like an endemic disease among the lowest class in every direction; and I shall have every cause to rejoice, if, on view of what has now been laid before you by pen and pencil, any one of your numerous readers and abler contributors should succeed in solving the difficulty, and remove thereby a dangerous, degrading, and false impression.

Witcombe, near Exmouth.
G.M.M.

As much interest has been excited by these extraordinary foot-tracks, I beg to offer you a few remarks in explanation of what I have observed in this neighbourhood (Topsham). Myself and another medical friend bestowed considerable time in endeavouring to discover the peculiarities of this most singular impression. The outline, certainly, in all cases resembles that of a hoof which has given rise to the idea of its supernatural origin among the ignorant; but, on more minute examination of the tracks, we could distinctly see the impressions of the toes and pad of the foot of an animal; a rough draft of which I showed to a friend of mine in Exeter, and, without any comment on my part, he recognised it as that of the otter, being well acquainted with that animal and its habits.

I have enclosed you a rough Diagram of the impressions which we observed within the hoof-like tracks; the outside toes were larger than the rest. I am not acquainted with the otter myself; but of this I am fully convinced, that the animal, be it what it may, is of low

stature, from the tracks having shown it to have passed uninterruptedly under the branches of shrubs, &c, not more than eight or nine inches from the ground; and in a neighbouring village it went through a six-inch pipe drain. It must be borne in mind that most rivers have been frozen over for some weeks, and therefore the otters have thus been prevented from obtaining their usual food - namely fish; and when such is the case, they ramble many miles in search of other food.

The otter is not a rare animal in this neighbourhood, and frequents the streams near Exmouth, Lypstone, Woodbury, Budleigh, Topsham, Clyst, the river Exe (in all which parishes tracks have been seen), as well as Dawlish, Torquay, Totnes, &c. The tracks in this parish we observed going in contrary directions; we did not notice any in a direct line, but in alternate steps, forming two parallel lines of steps. We also saw tracks on a low wall, and over the tiles of a lynch [44], and in several instances it had visited the summer-houses and tool-houses of gardens; in all of which portions of the same characteristics were more or less traceable, the ball or pad in the centre being more frequent than the others. Its visits have been repeated in some localities of this town.

Topsham, Feb. 26th, 1855.

Let your Correspondent, "South Devon," who furnished the accounts of footmarks published in your Number of Feb. 14th inst. know that if he, on any future occasion, should see such footmarks, he may, on accurate examination, discover a heelmark and three toemarks - made probably by the foot of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*). The two ends of the asinine shoeprints in your Number of last week are probably those of the two outer toes; and the upper rounded end, the cushioned junction of the toes at the heel end. I saw marks of this sort on Saturday, the 24th inst, after the commencement of the thaw on the Friday, and do not doubt of their being such as I have named. What I saw had evidently (although the thaw had partially obliterated them) a central third linear impression.

Ornither

Document 12

The Times. [45] 6
March 1855

THE MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS IN DEVONSHIRE. - The interest in this matter has scarcely yet subsided, many inquiries still being made into the origin of the footprints which caused so much consternation on the morning of the 8th ult. In addition to the circumstances mentioned in *The Times* a little while since, it may be stated that at Dawlish a number of persons sallied out armed with guns and other weapons for the purpose, if possible, of discovering and destroying the animal which was supposed to have been so busy multiplying the footmarks. As might have been expected, the party returned as they went. Various speculations have been made as to the cause of the footprints. Some have asserted that they are those of a kangaroo, while others affirm that they are the impressions of the claws of some large bird driven on shore by stress of weather. On more than one occasion reports have been circulated that an animal from a menagerie has been caught; but the matter at present is as much a mystery as it ever was.

Document 13

Trewman's Exeter Flying Post. 8
March 1855

THE 'MYSTERIOUS FOOT-PRINTS'. - A gentleman, residing at St Mary Church, Torquay, has given us the following and most probable cause of the mysterious footprints seen in different parts of this county. He says that, whilst the snow was on the ground he observed one morning some very curious marks in his garden. He traced them for a considerable distance, and ultimately into a shed or linnhay, and from thence under the stump of a tree, when, on examining the place closely, he soon discovered a very large toad, lying closely against the bank. He states that the impression left on the snow exactly corresponds with the woodcuts given in the *Illustrated London News* of March 3rd. Can anyone afford a better solution of this "mystery"? As for the impressions being

seen on house-tops - that's all moonshine. [46]

Document 14

The Illustrated London News.
10 March 1855

THE FOOT-MARKS IN THE SNOW, IN DEVON.

(We select the following from several additional communications upon this inquiry):-

In addition to what I said in my letter of the 28th ultimo [47], relative to the "Footmarks in the Snow in Devon," it appears to me that, as the "snow lay very thinly on the ground at the time," as stated by your Correspondent, such was the reason why the inner part of the tracks was not so clearly defined as the outer part of them; therefore the outline reversed would look like a donkey's track, as stated in my previous letter; and I presume the heel of the tracks has been taken for the forepart of them.

If birds made the tracks, they probably were either web-footed ones or waders - most likely the latter, as they could run much swifter and better across the country. Dr Buckland, in his "Bridgwater Treatise," vol.ii p.39 [48], in speaking of tracks in new red sandstone, set forth in plate 26A of that work, says - "None of the footsteps appear to be those of web-footed birds; they most nearly resemble those of Grallae (waders), or birds whose habits resemble those of Grallae. The impressions of three toes are usually distinct, except in a few instances; that of the fourth or hind-toe is mostly wanting, as in the footsteps of modern Grallae."

Now, if the foot-marks in the snow were made by waders, the shallowness of the snow is a sufficient reason why the impression of the fourth or hind-toe was not made (as in the cases noticed by Dr Buckland), and with respect to web-footed birds their hind-toe is very small.

The size of the tracks in the snow - namely four inches by two inches and three quarters - shows that they must have been made by very large birds (if they are attributable to them), and the probability is that some waders were frozen out by the severity of the weather from

the shores of the rivers or estuaries of the sea, and that they ran over South Devon in the night of the 8th ult. in search of food, and afterwards mounted aloft, as cranes do, before the dawn of day.

If the bird theory is correct, perhaps some one skilled in ornithology may, from the size of the tracks, and the distance (eight inches) of the stride between them, give some idea of what species of bird it was.

Jabez Allies

Tivoli House, Cheltenham, 3rd March 1855

Saint Mary's Church, Torquay, Devon, 3rd March 1855

Having seen in the *Illustrated London News* sketches of the foot-prints made in the snow in this neighbourhood by some animal unknown, and as various conjectures are made as to what animal has thus travelled over fields and gardens, and after going clean over housetops has not been stayed by a tidal river two miles wide, I send you an attempted explanation of the affair. There are certain times and seasons for the pairing and breeding of animals accurately fixed by Nature. The green plover is frequently caught in the snow in Scotland after his arrival in that country, and he must bear it as best he can, and why should not other animals have to face the snow-flake in the breeding season, and have to travel a weary way before they can make their beds and lay them down in peace? This, I am persuaded, is the hard fate of the animal who has caused such unwonted prints upon the snow in Devon; as I infer from the simple fact of finding the marks of the animal first, and then finding the carcass with the evident marks of a violent and sudden death in the track. It was neither bird nor beast that made the marks, but a reptile; not only putting his feet and claws (for he had claws) to the ground, but his belly too; hence the puzzle of the large print made in a line by his four feet and his belly all at once, every time he hopped. At the twenty-first milestone from Exeter, and third from Torquay, a large toad was found by me in the turnpike-road, crushed to death by a carriage-wheel; the track of the same was well defined for some distance along the road, and was exactly as described by your Correspondents and illustrated by you. [49]

The time for frogs and toads to spawn in Devon is rather earlier than in the north. Frogs are scarce here, but toads are not; and as Shaldon village lies against a steep hill, the houses admit toads to travel over them easily; and all toads that are to breed must travel to the water to do so, be the distance more or less; and as nobody turned out this unfortunate toad to seek his mate and meet his death, it has no doubt been the fate of others like him to have had a trip on the snow-flake.

Alex. Forsyth

BALLINGDON, near Sudbury, Suffolk, March 3, 1855.

The foot-marks described by your Devon Correspondent are made, in my opinion, by the poor despised and insignificant rat [50]. My brother lives in a house a quarter of a mile from Sudbury, surrounded by fields and gardens; he called my attention to the foot-marks of rats about his garden, and we found they had laid siege to his potato clamp. Tracing the depredators, he exclaimed, the Devonshire donkey has been here! and, on examination, I found the foot-marks exactly to agree with those described in the *Illustrated London News* for last week. We found the marks of no other mammalia, except of the rabbit, and no one would suppose they could all be made by the same kind of animal. The snow being drifted, and, consequently, of varying depths, afforded me an opportunity of observing the cause of the variety of the foot-marks. Where the snow was only one inch deep, marks were very distinct: in one they were caused by the rat walking slowly on all his toes; in another track he is evidently trespassing on the heel, as does the bear, the rabbit, and the squirrel; in another track the donkey shoe-form is more clearly defined, which is caused by the snow being deeper. The rat is an expert climber, though far inferior to the squirrel, whose conformation his greatly resembles: they are provided with a very powerful but short forearm, the muscles of which are strongly developed.

It is well known that when these little animals leap or bound along they alight upon their four feet very close together, and the large muscles of their short arm cause the *ulnae* to be far apart and nearly touching the ground, and in their descent form in the snow

the semi-circular part of the donkey shoe; and the toes of the hind-feet approaching near to the *ulnae* or, elbows of the forearm, complete it by forming its two sides. The impression between the heels and the shoe is made by the rat's tail. I should have said the distance from the toe of one impression to the heel of the preceding line was eight inches. Thomas Fox

We agree with a Correspondent that the following attempted solution, from the *Brighton Guardian* of Feb.29, between its jest and earnest, is calculated to envelop the subject in deeper mystery:-

[Here the *ILN* inserts a letter from the *Brighton Guardian*, 29 February. See Document 9]

[Next the *ILN* inserts an article from the *Inverness Courier*, 1 March 1855, concerning

mysterious footprints found in the Highlands. See Document 29 - ed.]



Fig. 3 - Drawing of the Hoofmarks by Thomas Fox from Document 14. See also Fig. 9a.

NOTES TO CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

1 - This sort of obstacle should have proved impassable even to a stilt-walker, so supporters of the Romany theory must assume that their gypsies sat on top of the walls and swung their stilts over the obstacle. One wonders if anyone inspected the snow-covered tops of the walls for the marks of such a passage.

2 - If, as the writer of this passage apparently suspected, there is some significance to the track-maker's predilection for the churchyard, a human or super natural agent would appear more likely than an animal.

3 - The 'travelling menagerie' theory is, of course, a familiar motif in 'out of place animal' stories - see, for example, Mick Goss, "The Crocodile of Cefn Caves", in *Fortean Times* 51:52-6. In fact, escapees from circuses and menageries rarely fare well in the wild; they are unused to fending for themselves. Nor was any evidence ever produced to prove that a travelling show had

lost one of its animals in the vicinity on the night in question.

4 - i.e., the night of 8/9 February 1855.

5 - Pointed fencing.

6 - The suggestion that a kangaroo was responsible for the hoof marks probably owed more to the animal's rarity in Victorian England, and to ignorance as to its precise habits, than to any real similarity between its footprints and those found in the snow.

7 - The apparently impassable barrier of the River Exe is mentioned by the *Illustrated London News* in its influential description of the mystery [document 7], "No known animal could have traversed this extent of country in one night, besides having to cross an estuary of the sea two miles broad," its correspondent noted. In fact, at low tide the river is as little as a couple of hundred yards wide in places, and is only four feet deep at one

point. In addition, within a week of 8 February it was reported that the intensely cold winter had frozen the estuary. At Exeter a party was held in mid-river, with food provided by a gas stove set up on the ice, while further south the iced-up Teign estuary was reported to have been crossed by a boy pushing a wheelbarrow. It is not clear whether the river Exe had already frozen by the night of 8/9 February, though a correspondent to the *Illustrated London News* (3 March) hints that it was. (See *Western Times* 17 Feb 1855 + *The Devil's Footprints: The Great Devon Mystery of 1855*, ed. G.A. Household, Devon Books, Exeter, 1985, pp.6,8.) There is, I suspect, no need to suppose that any mystery animal must have flown or swum the river; it could simply have walked, or hopped.

8 - From the close similarity in the phrasing of these details and the equivalent passage in *The Times*, and the proximity of then-publication dates, it would ap-

pear that the accounts in both papers were supplied by the mysterious 'Spectator'.

9-11 February 1855.

10 - This process of thawing and refreezing has been known to produce other anomalous foot prints, particularly in the Himalayan stronghold of the Yeti, where distorted bear footprints have been taken as the spoor of the Abominable Snowman. See John Napier, *Bigfoot* (Abacus 1972) pp.41, 47-8, 106-7, 110, 117, 165, 169. However, as the *Illustrated London News's* correspondent 'South Devon' pointed out [see Document 7], the tracks of 'cats, dogs, rabbits, birds' left that night remained distinct and recognisable.

Had the mysterious tracks been enlarged to the same degree as those of the author's horse, it is possible they were originally as small as 1 2/3 inches wide. See also Document 21.

11 - The 'cat' theory was also advanced by Henrietta Fursdon in *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries*. See Document 21.

12 - This, a distance of about 8 miles, could be the furthest the tracks were followed by any one person or group. It is important to remember that speculation about a trail 100 miles long or more is based on the estimate of the *Illustrated London News's* 'South Devon' [see Document 7]. Rupert Gould linked, by the shortest possible route, the main sites at which hoofmarks had been reported, and calculated the minimum distance travelled as 40 miles. There is, as Gould recognised, no evidence that a continuous track actually existed; indeed there are a number of references to sudden stops and starts [see Document 25]. The marks could have been made by two or more animals, devils or indeed parties of gypsies.

13 - It would appear from this statement that thawing and refreezing of the mysterious tracks may well have taken place.

14 - Tracks sticking to paths may well have been left by humans; there seems no reason why animals should favour paths, and if they were hunting for food one would expect them to prefer gardens.

15 - Satan having been bound, to be unleashed only after the fulfilment of certain prophecies in the Book of Revelation, according to the New Testament. See also note 18.

16 - Probably a reference to the kookaburra.

17 - This is the first suggestion that not all the prints were made on the night of 8 February.

18 - Most authorities represent Satan with two cloven hoofs, not one. However, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* is equivocal, observing both that the Devil is "represented with a cloven foot" and that "however he might disguise himself, he could never disguise his cloven feet."

19 - See Document 2.

20 - Identified by Theo Brown as¹ William D'Urban of Newport House, Countess Wear, who was 19 years old at the time of the incident. See document 23.

21 - This, apparently one of the most mysterious aspects of the case, is not actually true. See the table Descriptions of the Devil's Hoofmarks'.

22 - Again, these three important and influential statements may be doubted. See notes 7 and 12 and, for deviations in the straight line of prints, Document 3.

23 - A horny but elastic material

in the centre of the sole of a horse's foot.

24 - Not printed in the *Illustrated London News*.

25 - This is a reference to a contemporary clash between High and Low Church Anglicans in the Devon area. The High Churchmen, or Puseyites, were nominally members of the Church of England, but alarmed their more puritan brethren by their suspiciously Popish sympathies [see note 32]. They followed Dr Edward Pusey, a tractarian (that is, a contributor to Cardinal Newman's influential *Oxford Tracts*).

26 - It seems worth pointing out that the prints also appeared in many Anglican parishes, including those of Exmouth, Clyst St George and Lypstone, where the local clergymen took a keen interest in the phenomenon.

27 - Possibly a reference to the church warden.

28 - i.e., 13 February. Here we have a definite statement that some tracks appeared several days *after* the first prints were found on the morning of 9 February. This appears to contradict the idea that the trail was laid in a single night by bands of gypsies, though of course it may be that the scale of the operation was such that the Romanies had to complete it in stages. It has also been suggested that the Topsham prints were a hoax. Probably, though, the appearance of hoofmarks on a number of nights suggests an animal or natural explanation for the mystery.

29 - Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was a leading German explorer and scientist. *Cosmos*, his most popular work, was a multi-volume treatise on natural history published between 1845 and 1862 - 'a pro-

found and moving statement of our relationship with earth' (*Hutchinson Dictionary of Scientific Biography*).

A further reference to the Uniped(e) may be found in *Eirik's Saga* (Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Palsson, trans.: *The Vinland Sagas*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965, pp.101-102). There, however, it is Thorfinn Karlsefni and his crew who encounter the Uniped, rather than Bjarni Herjolfsson (Biom Herjolfson).

30 - It has not proved possible to identify this volume.

31 - Meaning obscure.

32 - A reference to the Puseyites' willingness to venerate saints as well as God - for example, by permitting the singing of the famous carol 'Good King Wenceslas' at Christmas. Woodbury was one of a number of Puseyite parishes in the district. See Document 22.

33 - Richard Owen (1804-1892), founder of the Natural History Museum and all-purpose Victorian scientific expert, was perhaps the leading naturalist of the time. Few non-scientists cared to take issue with him, though his reputation suffered in later years after he opposed Darwin's theory of evolution. See Nicolaas A. Rupke: *Richard Owen: Victorian Naturalist*, Yale University Press, 1994.

34 - Wooded.

35 - Having failed to interest the *ILN* in his letter, W.W. proceeded to publish his own pamphlet on the mystery. *The Swan With the Silver Collar* (Wells Journal Office, 1855) suggested that the marks

had been made by a swan, wearing protective pads in the shape of hooves, that had crossed the channel from France. The Journal no longer has a copy of this pamphlet, though Rupert Gould possessed one [see document 39].

36 - The author of this letter was himself a clergyman: the Rev. G.M. Musgrave, vicar of Exmouth.

37 - It is a shame this observation is at second hand, since it is so obviously anomalous.

38 - The shooting of mundane animals alleged to have been behind mystery animal flaps is another commonplace of the literature. Fort, for example, observes sceptically that a 1905 case from the north of England, where a wolf was thought to be on the loose, ended with the shooting of a large dog. See *Complete Books*, pp.649-661.

39 - A leopard.

40 - While the otter theory neatly explains some of the more mysterious tracks left on the night in question, the *ILN's* correspondent does not dwell on how an otter could walk through a hay stack.

41 - Scottish: 'person among'.

42 - With authority.

43 - Measure for Measure, Act II Scene 4.

44 - A farm outbuilding with an open front.

45 - The influence that *The Times* enjoyed in mid-Victorian Britain is not always appreciated by

modern readers. While it had both competitors and detractors, it stood far above the former, while the latter's criticisms meant little to most of its readers. Its articles were frequently taken up and reprinted by the provincial press, and it also enjoyed substantial prestige overseas. Thus, while the material it published on the Devil's Hoofmarks was largely a rehash of what had been said in the local papers, it had a substantially greater impact on the way in which the story was remembered than did the more detailed coverage of the *Illustrated London News* and the Devon press.

46 - It is hard to know how seriously to take this no-nonsense statement, but as it is a casual throwaway, and also unreferenced, we cannot really use it to dismiss the testimony of witnesses who claim such tracks were seen.

47 - This letter does not appear to have been among those published in the *ILN* of 3 March.

48 - Buckland, William (Dean of Westminster), *Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology*, 2 vols., London, 1836.

49 - Reptiles, of course, are active mainly in warm sunlight - certainly not on bitterly cold February nights. However, Victorians commonly grouped amphibians and reptiles together under the latter name.

50 - In more recent times, Alfred Leutschner and Maurice Burton both put forward the suggestion that the tracks were left by field mice. See introductory essay.

SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIALS

Document 15

Notes & Queries.

7th Series volume viii, 28 Dec 1889 pp.508-509.

PHENOMENAL FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW, S. DEVON.

- Staying recently in S. Devon, I was asked what solution *N&Q* had supplied for a phenomenon which seems to have convulsed England in general, and S. Devon in particular, some five-and-thirty years ago. I remember nothing about it myself, but I am told that on occasion of a deep fall of snow somewhere in the years 1852-4 an extraordinary track, consisting of a clawed foot-mark of unclassifiable form, alternating at huge but regular intervals with (seemingly) the point of a crutch-stick [1], and vaulting over walls, hedges, rivers, even houses, and obstacles of every sort, appeared over a surface of 35 miles, all produced in one night; that the track was followed up by hounds and huntsmen, and crowds of country folk, till at last, in a wood (I think it was said over Dawlish), the hounds came back baying and terrified. This was the moment when one would think the real excitement would begin. Nevertheless no one seems to have had the courage to rush in where the dogs feared to tread, and the matter ended in a battle of conjecture on paper. The most general local impression seems to have been that it was the devil put his foot in it, though so widespread a belief in so useless and partial a manifestation of a personal devil seems incredible. Now what did *N&Q* contribute to the inquiry? I have looked in the general index under all the headings under which I can conjecture that the matter might have been classified - "Fantastic", "Phantom", "Phenomenal", "Mysterious", "Footprints", "Snow", "Devon", "Devil's Walk", "Diable boiteux", "Hooky Walker" - but all in vain. Can any contributor better versed in back numbers assist me?

R.H. Busk

16, Montagu Street, Portman Square

Document 16

Notes & Queries.

7th S. ix, 11 January 1890, p.18.

PHENOMENAL FOOTPRINTS IN
SNOW, SOUTH DEVON. - The beast was discovered to be a common badger, and the storm that the foot-prints had caused dropped to dead calm in a single day.

D.

[Many similar replies are acknowledged.]

Document 17

Notes & Queries.

7th S. ix, 25 Jan 1890 p.70.

PHENOMENAL FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW, S.DEVON.

- Your anonymous correspondent at the last reference falls into the common error of "playing dominoes" instead of giving a reply. The query I reported from my Devonshire friends was, "what *N&Q* had said on the subject at the time". D., instead of supplying a reply, sends a *rechauffe* [2] of an exploded theory.

Some one, I am told, repeated my query in the *Western Morning News* (published at Plymouth but circulating over the whole of S. Devon) of the 31st ult. [3] A large number of answers were elicited by this, some of which have been forwarded to me, as well as a number of private communications. From all these it appears that the exact date was February, 1855. Mr David Kemeysa-Tynte, Balnageith, Torquay, partly from childhood's memory and partly from a book called *Country Essays* [4], supplies an account very similar to my first report. Mr E. Spencer, dating from Tavistock, disposes thus of the badger theory:-

"For years I had a (racing of the footprints taken by my mother in her garden, Montpellier House, Exmouth. It represented half a dozen hoof-like marks, such as would be made by a small donkey, only they were those of a biped; moreover, after reaching the gate of the garden, which was of close wood, they continued in the road outside. Prof. Owen, on being consulted, assuming that they must have been made by a

quadruped, replied that it must have been a badger, which places its hind foot exactly where the fore-foot had stood, and so left a trace like a biped.

But, unluckily, he had not been told that the same tracks were found on the flat tops of some buildings, and on that of a church tower [another correspondent adds "hayricks"]. Mr Spencer goes on to suggest ingeniously that the tracks might have been caused by herons driven from their usual haunts by strong frosts, "a slight thaw having obliterated the thin wedges of snow in each footstep, and given it the rounded, hoof-like form." He adds that he was led to this guess by seeing on a subsequent occasion some marks like a heron's track on a snowdrift over the Bransens Tor Brook. But I think it is difficult to imagine that the "slight thaw" - if there was one at all, and there is no contemporary evidence of the fact, but rather the contrary, as many speak of the snow remaining firm all the next day - could have so uniformly, over such a large tract of country as thirty or forty miles, transformed the appearance of a claw into that of a hoof.

Mr Charles Taylor, dating from Tavistock, is one who points this out. He has also taken the trouble to collect from the *Illustrated News* [5] of the moment various accounts, which exactly agree with that I sent you, supplying the further detail that the hoof impression measured 4 in. by 2 3/4 in., the distance between each tread being rather over 8 in., exactly the same in each parish, and that one wall the track passed over was 14 ft. in height. He goes on to quote that, besides the badger theory, the otter, bustard, and crane were all guessed at. It was also adduced that two kangaroos had escaped about that time from the Sidmouth menagerie. Mr C.B. Mount, Norham Road, Oxford, also supplies the reference to the *Illustrated London News*. But all fail at some point or another. Another correspondent writes:-

"I addressed communications to the British Museum, the Zoological Society, the keepers in the Regent's Park, and the universal reply was that they were utterly unable to form any conjecture on the subject." [6]

My friend the Rev. J.J. Rowe, Marychurch, writes: "The episode of the hounds, &c, I well and distinctly remember."

Christopher Foddard, Willow Bank, Paignton, writes:-

ton, writes:-

No allusion has yet been made to the mysterious footprints having extended into Dorsetshire. We were at Weymouth at the time, at Gordon Place, on the Green-hill. I remember a creepy feeling on seeing the hoofprints in the snow, which passed from Green-hill over the high wall of our garden ... I have a very distinct recollection; it was like the cloven hoof of a calf, one immediately in front of the other. I remember also the theory of their being caused by a badger ... But be it bird or beast ... why should these marks have simultaneously appeared over so wide an area, and never been observed before or since?

G.E. Garvey, 23 Walker Terrace, Plymouth, writes to similar effect, but apparently it was in Lincolnshire that he observed them. R.H. Busk 16, Montagu Street, Portman Square.



Fig. 4 - Drop capital 'S' from *Punch*, vol. 28, No 29 (1855), illustrating a piece entitled 'A Wonder at Wolverhampton', which mentions in passing a ghost, a sea serpent and the Devil's Hoofmarks - the Devil here played by Punch himself. Could this be the origin of the 'crutch stick' marks associated with the prints in later lore? (See Document 15, Note 1.)

Document 18

Notes & Queries.

7th S. ix, 1 Mar 1890 p.173.

PHENOMENAL FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

- My attention has been called to the discussion on the above subject. I do not know whether the matter has been threshed out to the satisfaction of your correspondents, so cannot say whether the following remarks will be of interest. At the time of this occurrence, Feb. 7, 1855, I was living in South Devon, and was seven years old. The impression made upon me was deep and lasting. The excitement and, among some classes, the consternation was intense. Devonshire was, and is, a superstitious county, and the ignorant unhesitatingly believed the foot steps to be those of his Satanic majesty. Many educated people, no really satisfactory explanation ever being forthcoming, retained the idea that there was something uncanny about the whole affair. My most vivid recollection of the matter is in connexion with the home of friends living at Exmouth. Here the footprints came up the front garden to within a few feet of the house, stopped abruptly, and began again in the garden at the back within a few feet of the building, just as if the animal, bird, or, adopting the popular idea, demon had made a gigantic leap. The only record I have of the affair consists of cuttings of the *Illustrated London News*, which give the accounts no doubt alluded to in your valuable paper. The issues of Feb. 24, March 3, 10 and 17, 1855, contain many most descriptive and entertaining letters, but the explanations and suggestions do not appear to me either satisfactory or conclusive.

W. Courthope Forman 35, Medora Road, Brixton Hill [Innumerable replies on this subject are acknowledged.]

Document 19

Notes & Queries,

7th S. ix, 29 Mar 1890 p.253.

PHENOMENAL FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW.

- Mr F.B. Bingley, of Guildford, writes to

the *Daily News* of March 7:-

"Kangaroos were kept, or perhaps still are, by a gentleman at Sidmouth. One escaped when a slight fall of snow was on the ground. The footprints, being so peculiar and far apart, gave rise to a scare that the devil was loose." L.L.K.

Document 20

Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries.

Vol.12 (1922-3) pp.197-8.

The Devil In Devonshire. - The following story in CO. Burge's *Adventures of a Civil Engineer* (1909), p.72, dates, he thinks, from the forties of last century, but well within the range of his memory: "One cold winter's morning when Devonshire lay deep in snow, it was found, by prints left distinctly in it, that some two-legged creature, taking enormous strides, had travelled the county from sea to sea. Each point was distinctly that of a hoof, and one followed the other at distances apart of from twelve to fourteen feet. But for one fact the track might have been made by a man on an enormous pair of stilts suitably shaped at the foot; this fact was that the course taken by the gigantic being, which was straight, never deviated where houses, barns, or other large obstructions crossed its path, but apparently went right through them, the snow being entirely untouched all round them. The distance covered in one night rendered the stilt theory also untenable, and the mystery, which was much written about in the few newspapers of the time, has never been cleared up to this day."

Can any reader supply exact references to contemporary accounts, or give further details? It would be interesting to have the exact date and route of His Satanic Majesty's visit. I have a vague recollection of hearing about a similar mysterious visit in the seventies, when people were so terrified that they were afraid of venturing outside their doors after dark.

R. Pearse Choape.

Document 21

Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries, Vol.12 (1922-) pp.265-7.

The Devil in **Devonshire**. - As a living witness to the footprints in the snow in 1855, I am writing my remembrance of them. I was a child myself, but my father, the Rev. Edward Fursdon, was the Vicar of Dawlish at the time, and, although there may have been other places where the footprints occurred, Dawlish was certainly the centre of interest, and where the footprints were most defined. It was late in the winter, either February or March, when the snow fell: the date could be ascertained from the *Illustrated London News*, of those months in 1855; where it was certainly reported and illustrated.

The footprints occurred in the night, and owing to my father being the Vicar he was immediately visited by curates, churchwardens, and parishioners to ask him his opinion of the footprints, which were all over Dawlish. They were in single file, in the shape of a small hoof, but contained in the hoof were the marks of claws. One track especially attracted attention, which went direct from the Vicarage to the Vestry door [7]; other tracks were found leading straight up to dead walls, and again found on the other side, many were found on the roofs of houses; and in all parts of Dawlish. All sorts of suppositions were raised as to the possibilities of its origin - escaped kangaroo or tiger from a travelling wild beast show, a donkey, and lastly, his Satanic Majesty - and from that supposition my father had letters from all parts of England inquiring for details.

I myself remember distinctly seeing the footprints, and my terror as a child of the unknown wild beast that might be lurking about, and the servants would not go out after dark to shut outer doors. The solution my father considered of this mystery was given to him by the tenant of the Aller Farm, Dawlish. My father was visiting him, and they spoke of the footprints; and he said he was quite sure they were the marks of cats. On the night they occurred he went out to tend his lambs between three and four. The house cat followed him, making the usual footprints in the snow. Whilst he was with the lambs, there was a slight thaw, and a shower of rain; and he saw the cat's footprints had been half-melted, and washed by the shower, and a frost coming on immediately, had frozen them into the shape of a small hoof, with still the

impression of the cat's claws enclosed. [8] I do not think there can be many eye-witnesses of the footprints left, and the information may be valuable to you. Henrietta E. Fursdon.

The Devil In Devonshire. - An aged lady, now resident in my house, was living in North Devon at the time of the startling occurrence, and remembers it distinctly, and how alarmed people were in the Bideford and Torrington districts. Few were courageous enough to be abroad after dark. From a menagerie an animal had escaped. The terror-spreading creature was a kangaroo. T. J. Joce.

The Devil In Devonshire. - ['J-S.A.' summarises the evidence given in the *Illustrated London News* of 17 and 24 Feb 1855. See Documents 7 and 11.]

Document 22

Report & Transactions of the Devonshire Association.

VoLLXXXII (1950) pp.107-12.

Forty-Severith Report on Folklore

By W.F. Jackson Knight, Recorder

No new observations concerning folk-lore have been submitted during the period covered by this Report. Certain members of the Association have, however, reported the outstanding questions of the mysterious occurrences in Devonshire during 1855 and 1921 [9]. Some account of them should clearly be presented here, and sooner rather than later. Therefore, with the approval of the General Editor, Miss Theo Brown was asked to compile an account, as far as possible up-to-date. This Report is followed by what she has written. The Report itself ends here.

THE GREAT DEVON MYSTERY OF 1855 or "THE DEVIL IN DEVON"

No account of this extraordinary affair has hitherto appeared in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, although the centenary of the event will be upon us in another five years. The best known account was given in the *Illustrated London News* of 24th February,

1855, p.187, as follows:-[See

document 7]

It is a pity that the "copy of the foot" was not reproduced; the accompanying wood-engraving showed only the trail, as a series of donkey's hoof-marks.

The account should be compared with the contemporary Devon journals; for instance, that given in *Woolmer's Plymouth & Devon Gazette* of 17th February, 1855, p.5 [10]. This states that the night of 8th February was marked by a heavy fall of snow (as opposed to the thin layer described in the other notice), and this was followed by rain, boisterous wind from the east, and, in the morning, frost. These sound like the conditions which produce an ammil frost, such as we experienced in February 1947. All the weather reports of early 1855 indicate an exceptionally severe winter: the *Morning Chronicle* of 22nd February mentions skating on the Serpentine and ice on the Thames thick enough to walk across. The Devon papers paint a gruesome picture of the privations of the poor at this time, hundreds out of work in Torquay alone, bakers unable to get through to Lustleigh, benighted folk frozen to death; and editorials make eloquent appeals to the rich to subscribe generously to the many soup-kitchens and coal-funds. The Saturday before the trail was laid, the road between Exmouth and Exeter was frozen over and the regular coach service had to be suspended (*Western Times*, 10th February). A few days later the Teign was frozen over in several places (*Western Times*, 17th February), and on the 16th the sea-wall at Teignmouth collapsed taking with it a section of the railway.

In *Woolmer's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, 24th February, it was stated that the River Exe had been frozen over for more than a fortnight, and was now safe for skating from the Exe Bridge to the Salmon Pool. In the issue of the 17th, it is stated that on the Tuesday last (five days after the "mystery") the ice was so thick at St Thomas's, that, besides skating, gas was laid on from the main street, and a gas stove, placed on the ice, cooked a huge dinner! Did the mysterious creature swim or *walk* across the Exe? Incidentally, at no point till it reaches the coast is the Exe two miles across,

as stated by the *Illustrated London News* correspondent. *Woolmer's Gazette* adds to the list of places visited: Teignmouth, Starcross, Topsham and Littleham; one is inclined to believe that the creature did not swim the estuary at all, but may just have walked across the river at some point above Topsham.

Now, as to "South Devon's" point about the footsteps being in a single line which has given rise to so much excitement, and which has been quoted again and again, I would like to say that this is the only contemporary account I have met with that makes any such claim. The *Western Times* of the 24th gives the headline: "THE TWO-LEGGED WONDER"; *Woolmer's Gazette* states that the steps are generally 8" in advance of each other, but sometimes 12" or 14", and are "alternate of each other like the steps of a man and would be included between two parallel lines six inches apart." The marks look like donkey's shoes, but they varied in thickness from 1/2" to 3/4" across. They sometimes looked cleft, but were usually "continuous and perfect". In the centre of the shoe the snow remained intact, and only the outer edge was clearly marked. A Dawlish correspondent corroborates that the mark was rumoured to be cloven. On the Friday, people armed themselves with bludgeons and guns to try and follow up the tracks. "In no place could be traced more than two impressions which were about sixteen inches apart." There was hardly a garden in Lypstone where the footprints were not to be seen, even on top of houses, narrow walls, etc.; they appeared often to approach doorways and then to retreat. They went right through the middle of Dawlish. I have not so far been able to discover any account of the trail further west to Totnes. My father used to speak of it - he was born only 10 years after the event, and the track had passed near our place as it proceeded from Torquay, through Barton and Watcombe towards Dawlish.

Explanations suggested in 1855 ranged from: "The poor are full of superstitions, and consider it little short of a visit from old Satan or some of his imps," to hints given from the Lypstone pulpit by Rev. G.M. Musgrave to Exmouth, who considered the marks were made by a kangaroo!

Since that period, the mystery has offered

much scope to many kinds of investigators. The zoological theories varied unconvincingly from a bird carrying a donkey's shoe to Prof. Owen's hind leg of a badger. Commander Gould notes the proximity of the sea; as also does Elliott O'Donnell who included the story in his *Strange Sea Mysteries*, 1926, on the grounds that the monster started from Totnes, the highest navigable point of the River Dart, and followed the coast, roughly to Exmouth, where presumably it disappeared into the sea. The late Mr Harry Price in *Poltergeist Over England* mentions this phenomenon among the many inexplicable happenings which might be due to poltergeist activity.

A possible parallel case has occurred in Devon, which is mentioned in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* for 1876 (Vol. VIII, p.659). R.J. King quoted a story from Kemble's *Saxons*, vol. i, p.351 [11], about the Dewerstone on Dartmoor. Here, after a heavy fall of snow, were found the print of a naked human foot and the print of a cloven hoof, both ascending towards the highest point..

In 1840 little horse-shoe tracks were found in the snow of uninhabited Kerguelen Island in the Antarctic (Lt.Comr. R.T. Gould, *Oddities* pp.20-1) [12]. Will each of these occurrences be eventually attributed to "natural causes" with the advance of scientific knowledge? Or should they all be studied together as a group? If so, the "Abominable Snowman" of the Himalayas is the best-known modern example and it should be carefully investigated. The "Snowman" may be bears or giant yogis, as hinted by various correspondents in *The Daily Telegraph*, January to February, 1950. Mr Ward Price, writing from Tibet in the *Daily Mail* of Tuesday, 14th March, 1950, said that his muleteers "declared they had seen them quite near the rest-house where I passed a night. Much bigger than ordinary men, they are said to have had their heads and feet turned backwards."

As regards our own case, *The Western Times* raises three interesting points which should be carefully borne in mind. First, in the issue of 17th February, 1855, regarding the Exmouth tracks: "It is said that a similar occurrence took place here about five years ago."

Secondly, on the 24th, writing of the tracks

at Topsham: "Its first appearance here was on the eve of St Valentine." This is the only indication so far that the track was not made overnight on the 8th. Was it perhaps started on the 8th and continued by purely human agents as the idea spread?

Thirdly, in the same issue one reads of the footprints: "Some people say it is sent as a warning to the Puseyites - hence it is that the 'phenomenon' has visited the Puseyite parishes of Woodbury, Topsham, and Littleham-cum-Exmouth. In this place it has traversed the churchyard - and even to the very door of the vestibule. The 'sombre perpetual' has not, it is said, exhibited a pleasant countenance since the occurrence." And in another place we find the headline, "SATAN IN THE DIOCESE OF HENRY EXETER". [13]

This sounds too absurd. But *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, which has no space for mysteries of any kind, devotes most of its correspondence columns from 11th January onwards to the enormities of the dreadful incumbent of Woodbury. His crowning profanity appears to have been the introduction at Christmas of a new book of carols which expressed most unseemly sentiments: the doings of a certain King Wenceslas were extolled, one carol stated that ox and ass bowed down at the Nativity of Our Lord, while some carols even indued a line or two of Latin! It is hard to understand, after all these years, the bitterness of these letters.

However, it does seem to be a line worth following up, when studying the Devon Mystery, though if the trail was started by anti-Puseyite practical jokers, we need not expect, necessarily, to find this motive in every parish concerned. Incidentally, there was another fracas in full swing at St Marychurch. Church funds were low, and the vicar and his wardens had concocted a deed authorising themselves to levy a church rate of 2V₂d in the pound! (*Western Times*, 17th February.)

At this point the discussion must be left for the time being. Further information may still be obtainable from family papers, diaries, contemporary letters, etc., and would be most welcome. Meanwhile, we heartily thank Mr L.C.W. Bonacina, F.R.Met.S., whose enquiries reopened this problem.

Document 23

Report & Transactions of the Devonshire Association.

Vol. LXXXIV (1952) pp.163-171

A Further Note on the 'Great Devon Mystery'

By Theo Brown

I

Following the previous note (*Transactions*, vol.lxxxii (1950) pp.107-12), more research has been undertaken, and some information has come to light, which, though it does not "solve" the mystery, does introduce some evidence hitherto unpublished which qualifies the previous picture.

First, as regards the physical limitations on the "monster" which perpetrated the long trail, over roof-tops, etc.: a letter in *The Illustrated London News* of 3rd March, 1855 [14], says that pad-marks were visible under bushes with branches 8" or 9" from the ground, at Topsham, and at a nearby village the trail passed *through* a 6" drain pipe.

Then, a comment on the *length* of the trail, from Totnes to Exmouth, which was reported in the account quoted in the previous note from *ILN* 24th February, 1855. I can still find no supporting evidence that the track started so far west, except that one letter, *ILN* 3rd March, says "...Dawlish, Newton, etc.", and the fact that the man who wrote the first statement is known to have been an exceptionally careful observer. *The Torquay Directory* of 21st February, 1855, uses an account common to *Woolmer's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, 17th February, *The Times*, 16th February, and the *News of the World*, 25th February; it adds nothing to associate the tracks with Torbay or with Totnes. I have made a number of fruitless enquiries; South Devon is an expanding area in which traditions are hard to trace. Most contemporary accounts begin the trail "from the cutting at Dawlish", etc., or from Teignmouth.

At Teignmouth, there is a tradition that the footprints came *across* the beach, through the town, past the present gas works, and on up the lane called The Lea, towards Bishopsteignton. I was told this by an old fisherman, Mr W Hook. I am again indebted to the Harbour

Master, to Mr C.J.R. Gilpin, Mr E.G.C. Griffiths and to Miss R.I. Thomas of *The Mid-Devon Advertiser* who drew my attention to the tradition, also to the Editor of that periodical who kindly published a letter for me on the subject.

Other people who have made enquiries for me are: Mr D. Fletcher of the Tofnes Antiquarian Society, Mr Edward F. Burt of the Torquay Borough Library, Mr A.G. Madan of the Torquay Museum, and Mr C.E. Hicks of the Torbay Branch. I am very grateful to them all, and it is possible that we may yet unearth something positive.

Immediately after the first note was published, a member, Maj. A.H. Gibbs of Pytte, Clyst St George, informed me that he held a large quantity of letters and drawings in the parish box of his church, all collected by the Rev. H.T. Ellacombe, who was Rector of Clyst St George from 1850-1886, and is well known as the author of *Church Bells of Devon*. Maj. Gibbs has very kindly allowed me to make extracts and to quote from these documents.

The letters are mainly addressed to Mr Ellacombe from various friends and authorities whom he had consulted. These include: the Rev. G.M. Musgrave of Withecombe Raleigh, W.I. Brodrip and Prof. (later Sir Richard) Owen, the well-known naturalists, and Dr LA. Ogle of Oxford. There are also traces of drawings, made on the spot (I conclude), a MS poem of great length by Musgrave and a still longer one by him, in print: "Valentine's Day, the Tale of a Griffin", - which poor creature had started out from Dawlish, got lost around Topsham (note the statement in *The Western Times*, quoted in my previous paper [15], that the tracks did not appear at Topsham till St Valentine's Eve). There are also some more recent letters and cuttings.

The most interesting item, however, is the rough copy of a letter which Ellacombe sent to *The Illustrated London News* with the request that it should not be published. The copy was evidently made in haste and the writing, in places, is extremely difficult to read. He states that he saw the marks at Clyst St George "tho' not till two or three days after they were first seen," and his letter, dated 13th March, 1855,

continues:-

"There is no doubt as to the facts - that thousands of these marks were seen on the snow on the morning of the 9th ult. extending over many miles on either side of the Estuaries of the Exe & the Clyst - even to the suburbs of the City. All agree in form - *varying some little in size* - but the general appearance was the same - that of a Donkey's Shoe - such is the answer given me by my parishioners & other neighbours who saw them on that morning - they seemed - to use an expression of a statement which appeared in the *Illustrated News* [sic] Feb.26 - 'as if the snow had been branded with a hot iron' - or the form of such a shoe had been cut out with a knife - to the ground - which was everywhere visible, tho' the snow in the middle part did not appear to be touched! - the depth was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch - it fell at midnight - when there was a sleet & a *thaw*, and after that a *freeze* [16] - the night was not dark, the marks, as of one creature were on my own premises - across a Lawn round the house to a Pump Shed - these were visible three days afterwards. My Dog barked that night and so did the dogs of my neighbours where marks were seen. There is scarcely a field or an orchard or Garden where they were not - all in a single line - under hedges - in one field near me; a turning round and doubling appeared - (two neighbours who followed the tracks thro' the same field in the snow [? hand writing almost illegible here] met with Excrement (and there the tracks were spread [?]... doubled: but afterwards, single.

"The same was observed more or less in all the adjoining parishes.

"At Exmouth (distant 5 miles) I have been informed by those who saw them there were marks in the middle of a field, insulated - without any apparent approach or retreat - and all in one direction - & so they were in many gardens closed with high walls - in one the marks appeared under a wall to the end of a garden - & then turned round & returned *half the length*. At a house at Marley near Exmouth, marks were seen on the Cill of a window two stories high. From all these and much more information which I have gathered from credible eye witnesses, one would suppose that some winged creatures alighted from above - traversed a certain space - & then



Fig.5 - The Rev. H.T. Ellacombe (1790-1885). From Theo Brown, *Devon Ghosts* (Document 25).

soared on high & away - it is very well known that many flocks of wild Fowl visit these Estuaries during the severe weather - "

He concludes by saying that perhaps the tracks may, after all, be those of a two-footed entity hopping, and that the donkey's shoe appearance is due to atmospheric conditions. He adds a drawing of the mark showing what some observers call claws. A footnote says: "A Note on the Excrementa. Four oblong lobes of a Whitish Colour - the size and shape of a large grape." Yet another addendum remarks that he had obtained samples which he had forwarded to Prof. Owen, with what result I do not know. Neither of Owen's letters mention them.

Another place visited at Clyst St George was Pytte, where Maj. Gibbs lives. In 1855 a Mr Doveton lived there, and Mr Ellacombe said that the trail led up to a garden door, which was closed, then appeared the other side of it and ran all round the garden. To do this, Maj. Gibbs tells me, it must have hopped an eight-foot wall!

A letter from the Rev. George Musgrave (dated 21st February) states that the prints were made by a crane which was shot at Otterton, thereby recanting his previous opinion of a kangaroo, which escaped from Sidmouth and was shot near Teignmouth. He

adds: "The sages of Lymptone pronounced the *vestigia utiorsum* [17] to be decidedly Satanic: and an Exmouth old woman has taken occasion to remind us that Satan was to be unchained for a thousand years."

A further letter from him, dated the 26th February, states that "young D'Urban" wrote the article in the *Illustrated London News* but that his drawing of the trail is not quite accurate, and gives drawings of six prints. However, I give copies of all the known tracings. The difference between the various marks is so great that I still believe the cause to be multiple - in which case Mr d'Urban's drawings stand and we have no reason to doubt their accuracy.

There is also the MS copy of a long poem by Musgrave - thirteen verses of it, each containing eight lines, to the effect that people tended to blame each other's animals for the marks: a neighbouring parson had a dog's paw-marks all over his roof and accused the author's Newfoundland, now dead these seventeen years; other suspect agents include: a grandmother's pattens [18], a donkey, a kangaroo, a badger, an otter, a duck, cat and gull. The route is said to run "from the cutting at Dawlish to Littleham Cove", crossing the sand at Warren.

III

The "young D'Urban", mentioned by Musgrave, was the grandson of the founder of Durban. He lived to the age of 96 and left a daughter, Mrs R. Coates, now living at Bronte

House, Lymptone. She writes of the 1855 visitation (letter dated 27th September, 1951):- "My father was 19 and my mother 16. My father lived at Newport House, Countess Wear, and my mother at Winslade, Clyst St Mary. The marks were all along the high garden wall and over the roof at Winslade; both my father and my mother saw them and often talked to me about them. As you know, the marks were all over Haldon and I have been told they came down to the water's edge opposite Lymptone and appeared again this side."

IV

From Professor Owen's two letters to Mr Ellacombe, it is evident that he had been sent two drawings of the track as it appeared at Luscombe and Clyst St George. Figure [6b] almost certainly depicts *one* of these. He was dubious as to the accuracy of the drawings, but, assuming that they were correct, he ruled out the theory of otter or bird and decided, rather dogmatically, in favour of a badger, saying that badgers roamed far in snow conditions, and could, moreover, *climb*. Mr Brodrip seems to have agreed with this.

The drawings of the track, by Ellacombe, do resemble the shoe-marks of a donkey, and it is quite obvious that the supposed "claw marks" are simply snowed up "feathers" at the rear of the foot, familiar to all hunting people. And therefore, where "claws" were seen, the track must have been read backward! The donkey does place its feet almost in

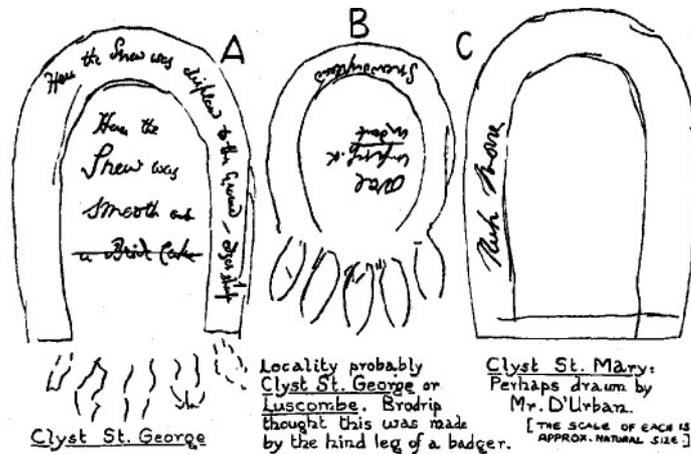


Fig. 6 ■ Facsimiles of drawings from among the Ellacombe Papers. From Theo Brown, 'A Further Note on the Great Devon Mystery' (Document 23).

a straight line as in Mr D'Urban's drawing in the *Illustrated London News* of 24th February, 1855. The marks depicted by Mr Musgrave, from Exmouth, look more like pony shoes which have broken in half - it even seems possible to identify the feet in the six examples shown. Another explanation for the broken shoes has been suggested by Mr Irish, the well-known Sidford blacksmith; when I showed him the Musgrave drawings, he said they looked much like old oxen "cues", which were of course made in two pieces to fit the cloven hoof. But only the hind feet were shod.

Of course, neither oxen nor donkeys could hop over roof-tops or crawl through a 6" drain; but they may have accounted for some of the tracks.

I have consulted Mr H.G. Hurrell on the matter. He says that the badger does make a straight track, but the spoor is quite different and shows two claws, and although thawing might enlarge the marks even to the size of a man's boot (as it sometimes does) the characteristics would be constant. The description of the excrement is nothing like that of a badger or a bird of any kind, and of course no bird makes a mark anything like a donkey's shoe. However, as he points out, the sudden appearance of the track in the middle of a field can only point to a bird, and,

similarly, the ability to leap walls, etc. He makes three interesting points:-

"(1) In the isolated field they were found in the middle ... and they were all facing the same way; against the wind.

"(2) The excrement may well have been the *castings* or undigested pellets of birds. They are about grape size and are sometimes whitish in many good-sized birds.

"(3) The outlines of the tracks are so irregular that it looks as if the feet had been frozen up."

With these points Mr R.G. Adams, the well-known ornithologist who lives at Lympstone, concurs. The shape of the prints baffles the naturalists, who say that if it is due to the ice freezing on birds' feet, then it may happen again! Mr L.C.W. Bonacina remarks that in a "glazed frost" birds stick to snow and that if anything like this happened in February 1855, it is curious that no-one seems to have mentioned the fact; Ellacombe expressly mentioned the flocks of birds taking refuge in the estuaries but did not seem to have noticed anything peculiar about their feet.

Finally, a brief note on parallel occurrences. Mr R. Waterfield has noticed a reference to Borley Rectory in *Unbidden Guests*, by Wm. O.

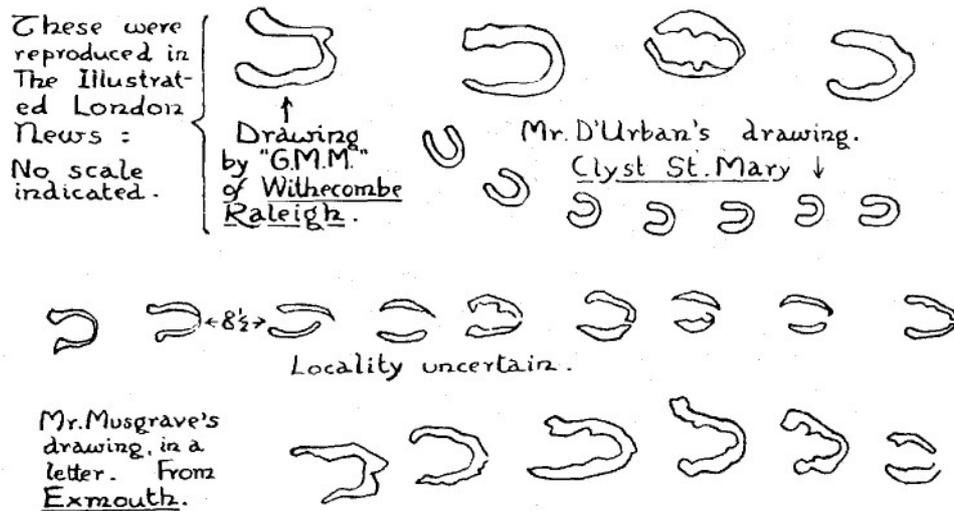


Fig.7 - Drawings from the *Illustrated London News* (above), compared with those from the Ellacombe Papers (below). From Theo Brown, 'A Further Note on the Great Devon Mystery' (Document 23).

Stevens (1949), p.79, who says that Capt. W.H. Gregson observed "...a track of blurred, formless, but distinct footprints in new-fallen snow that trailed along the garden and ended abruptly. They could not have been made by human being [sic] or by any other known form of life, and they stopped in a way that defied explanation."

Montague Summers, in *The Vampire in Europe* (1929), mentions an odd case in his introduction. In June, 1918, a lady took a small house "at Penlee, South Devon, not far from Dartmouth" (there is no Penlee that I know of in South Devon; either Penlee is not the name, or Cornwall must be intended). The house seems to have inspired awful nightmares, and one morning, the mark of a single cloven hoof was found in the middle of the parquet flooring; there being no means of entrance for anything so large.

Two interesting cases should be quoted from the correspondence which followed the Great Devon Mystery, in *ILN* of 10th and 17th March, 1855 [19]. Near the Galician border of Russian Poland there is a hill, called Piashowar gora, which is said to mean Sandhill. Every year, footprints similar to those in Devon are found, running round the side of the hill. And even where there is no snow, the marks are seen on the sand. It is hardly necessary to add that the cause was locally reputed to be a supernatural one!

Labrador is the scene of yet another phenomenon. When Biorn Heriolfson, from Iceland, discovered Labrador in AD 1001, he is supposed to have found there a bird with only one foot which was shaped like a hoof, slightly divided. He named this strange object a "Uniped". [20]

VI

Besides these, other cases of strange footprints crop up in various parts of the world from time to time. Hence, it has seemed worth while to study carefully the example on our own doorstep. There is so far no one explanation that can fully fit all the known facts, but two new points emerge from the Ellacombe collection of papers and drawings:-

(i) The trail is now *known* not to have been continuous, since it appeared suddenly in the middle of fields around Exmouth.

(ii) The print varied considerably in size

and shape, judging by the tracings of drawings made by contemporary observers living on the east side of the Exe (though Y may possibly have been collected at Luscombe).

Thus it is fairly evident that the cause was a multiple one. If one bird with frozen feet could have been responsible, then probably a number were involved, and these might account for the straggling marks like those shown from Exmouth, and those on roof-tops, etc., but I do not believe that any bird, however strangely frozen up, could possibly have produced all the Clyst marks, so exactly resembling those of a donkey. I still feel pretty confident that some of the tracks may have been "assisted" by humans with the aid of a hot donkey's shoe or even a man's heel-iron (i.e., a "stook" shaped like a small horseshoe), after the surface of the snow was frozen hard so that it would not show ordinary footprints. This, if true, demonstrates the well-known tendency to improve on a story, aided by wishful thinking by human agency.

The motives might range from practical jokes to fanatic zeal associating burning hoof-marks with the "Puseyite parishes"!

Document 24

Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association.

Vol. LXXXVI (1954) pp.295-6.

Fifty-First Report on Folklore

by Theo Brown, Recorder

THE GREAT DEVON MYSTERY I am indebted to Captain E.C. Brent, RN, DSO, and to Mrs Meredith Williams for some further useful references to the Mystery. These references are to be found in a short correspondence in *Notes & Queries*, 7th Series, Vols. VIII and IX, December 1889, pp.508-9, to January 1890, pp.18 and 70 [21]. One tradition in South Devon described the track as a "clawed foot mark of unclassifiable form, alternating at huge but regular intervals with (seemingly) the point of a crutch stick" and adds "that the track was followed up by hounds and huntsmen, and crowds of countryfolk, till at last, in a wood (I think it was said over Dawlish), the hounds came back baying and terrified." Montpelier House,

Exmouth, is added to the list of private gardens visited by the "monster" who appears to have left donkey-like prints inside and outside the closed gate. A cloven hoof appeared at the same time at Weymouth in Dorset, and a further memory extends the path of the track across England to Lincolnshire, but the year cited is circa 1853. So it may refer to a different occasion.

An interesting theory, which hands the problem to the meteorologists, is given in an article by J Allan Rennie in *Chamber's Journal*, December 1953, p.745. [22]

Mr Tom Pym has given me a folk memory of the visitation. He says that the Devil walked from the Teign Valley, down over Haldon into Powderham, past the church. He then got over the river Exe into Lympstone, and came up the main road from Exmouth to Topsham. He came up the hill from Lympstone. He (or rather, I suppose, his footprints) was seen by the pub on Bridgehill, "and there was the last track of 'un."

Document 25

Extract from *Devon Ghosts*, by Theo Brown (Norwich, 1982) pp.47-53.

The Great Devon Mystery

The winter of 1854-5 was a hard one; judging by the contemporary newspapers the 'Crimean winter' was decimating our troops far from home who already had enough to endure from wounds, disease and shortages of all kinds due to lack of organisation. Here at home weather conditions caused widespread unemployment and hunger; horse-drawn supplies could not get through to the villages and old folk were known to drop dead in the streets. In the West Country soup-kitchens and other hastily organised charities offered scanty palliatives. The better-off sat by their firesides and composed furious letters to the press inveighing against the goings-on of the Puseyites who were infiltrating the Church of England, dressing their choirs in surplices and using J. M. Neale's 'Popish' book of carols. All too soon their fears would appear justified, with headlines in the local press about the Devil visiting Devon in person in order to embarrass the Bishop of Exeter.

The night preceding 8 February there was

a light fall of snow, followed by what in these parts we call an 'ammel frost' - i.e. a slight thaw and a very sharp frost which means that the snow becomes ice, particularly treacherous if the layer of snow is shallow as this was. The next morning when the honest Devonians looked out of their houses they were amazed to find a seemingly endless track of what looked like donkey's hoof marks, zig-zagging across gardens and fields.

Some of the more curious followed the tracks a little way. Apparently every mark was exactly the same, and they proceeded in a dead straight line keeping the exact distance of 8 V* inches apart. What was even odder was that no obstacle made the slightest difference. The creature (whatever it was) on coming to walls simply continued the other side as though it had walked straight through. A shed would be entered at the back wall and the footsteps emerge again the other side. Houses were walked over - you could see the marks going over the roof-tops. Low bushes were walked under, and a six-inch drain pipe passed *through*.

People quickly compared notes and journalists started to try and collate the reports and rumours. The first of these was a young man, called D'Urban, aged 19, who was later to become the first Curator of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum at Exeter. He listed the places where the track was observed, starting at Totnes and travelling eastwards. They included reports from Torquay, Dawlish, Luscombe and places the other side of the Exe estuary: Woodbury, Lympstone, and Exmouth. This account was published in *The Illustrated London News* of 24 February. *Wooltner's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, however, had reports in their 17 February issue, naming Teignmouth, Starcross, Topsham and Littleham as well, but not mentioning Totnes. How the tracks crossed the Exe is not discussed, but as the river was thickly frozen, no doubt that presented no difficulty. The previous Sunday the Vicar of Exmouth, the Reverend George M. Musgrave, had used the occasion to warn his flock that Satan is ever ready to cross our path, though in his opinion these particular footprints were not made by the Devil but by an escaped kangaroo. However, it does not look as though many heeded his cautious words, for the paper remarks: "The poor are

full of superstition, and consider it little short of a visit from old Satan or some of his imps.' An editorial comment bewails the 'vast amount of ignorance and superstition which still lingers in the rural districts of the county', remarking that in his town some of the prints were said to be cloven, and a Dawlish correspondent wrote:

'So great was the excitement produced by the reports which got abroad that a party of tradesmen and others armed themselves with guns and bludgeons, and spent the greater part of the day in tracing the footprints. From the church-yard they proceeded to the grounds of Luscombe and Dawlish-water, and thence to Oaklands. At length, after a long and weary search, they returned as wise as they set out.'

A generation later, a Londoner who was visiting South Devon in 1855 added: '...The track was followed up by hounds and huntsmen, and crowds of country folk, till at last, in a wood (I think it was said over Dawlish), the hounds came back baying and terrified.' [23] Some people even reported that the footprints they investigated showed clear evidence of claws, thus increasing the horror of the incident.

An editorial comment in the *Western Times* (24 February), discussing the 'Two-Legged Wonder', the 'Satanic Hoof at Topsham and Exmouth, commented: '...and some people say it is sent as a warning to the Puseyites, hence it is that the "phenomenon" has visited the Puseyite parishes of Woodbury, Topsham, and Littleham-cum-Exmouth. In this very place it has traversed the churchyard - and even to the very door of the vestibule. The "sombre perpetual" has not, it is said, exhibited a pleasant countenance since the occurrence.' [24]

This account, appearing beneath the famous headline 'Satan in the Diocese of Henry Exeter', says that the footmarks were first seen on St Valentine's Day, but I think that the tracks were not all laid on one night but, first appearing on the night of 8 February, were found over a period of some days or even weeks.

Of course at that time - and ever since - people have discussed this mystery, and all the great naturalists have been consulted. However, it can safely be said that no one

has ever propounded a solution that covers all the points. There is a vast amount of paper in journals and letters that one can consult; above all if one follows the track all the way from Exmouth to Torquay one can still find family memories, oral traditions of the event, but little solid evidence. Every kind of animal from rats to a kangaroo has been proposed. A Mr Fish [25] at Sidmouth kept a wallaby at Knowle, Sidmouth, and this having escaped was thought by some to be the answer; Professor Owen offered a badger, but neither of these could have jumped a fourteen-foot wall or squeezed through a six-inch drain pipe, let alone have left clear marks on the sill of a second-story window!

There is little evidence that the tracks started further west than Teignmouth, though an item in my grandfather's scrapbook makes one wonder. The Barton Hall estate used to extend to the coast at Watcombe till about 1848 when this portion was sold to Isambard Kingdom Brunel in order to build his great house. The quotation goes: 'On a winter's morning the men on the estates were startled at the discovery of strange footprints in the snow; the "cloven foot" was the general remark along the countryside.' My father, who often told us the old story, believed that the creature had crossed the Dart at some point and started as far west as Bolt Head. In any case the mysterious creature that hopped on one leg the best part of a hundred miles in one night was the basis for a favourite yarn-Here opinions differed sharply. Had it one leg or two? If two they were not directly in front of each other. In fact the first point I spotted was that no one at that time and in those weather conditions could follow the tracks far enough to be certain they were continuous. Then the churchwarden of Clyst St George, the late Major A. H. Gibbs, who lived at Pytte, his family home, contacted me and most generously allowed me to consult a dossier on the mystery which was kept in the parish chest. This had been meticulously compiled by the famous church bell expert, the Reverend H.T. Ellacombe, who had been the vicar in 1855. He made careful drawings of the tracks and had found that the marks were *not* continuous, but appeared sporadically, e.g. suddenly in the middle of a field, with flurry surrounding them, as though made by a

large ice-laden bird struggling to take off. It was noticed in the Exe estuary that many of the birds seeking water were liable to become frozen into the water, as has happened in some more recent frosts this century. So birds with ice on their feet seem part of the solution, but not all.

The detailed drawings of the hoof-marks were most revealing. They varied greatly; from some sectors came hoof-marks plainly made by a pony-shoe, again some were broken and vaguely looked cloven. Some were certainly made by a stray donkey (donkeys are the only animals that plant their feet in an almost perfect single line). Some showed iced-up 'feathers' at the back, forming the supposed 'claws' that had excited a lot of people - though this meant the trail had been read backwards.

However, though we can reconstruct much of the mystery (and the marks at Woodbury were obviously manufactured by practical jokers with a hot shoe, since they were said at the time to look like this, the shoe pressed cleanly down to the ground as if made by a hot iron), yet no one explanation will cover all the reported factors.

Other mysterious tracks are reported from all over the world, and England is full of its share. About the time of our 'visitation' it was said that another track was laid from Dorset right across England into Lincolnshire; attempts have been made to link up the two, but not convincingly. Furthermore, a Dartmoor man has told me that there is a tradition of another track coming down from North Devon across Dartmoor to the southern side.

In 1955, I was talking to a group at Ipplepen and mentioned our famous mystery, and they at once told me there had been footprints seen that February at a house in the village. So I looked in. It is a very old house, said to have been a meeting house for Orange supporters. It is L-shaped and thatched. One day in February, the lady of the house saw it was snowing very heavily; she was a little anxious, as the roof timbers were none too strong, so she went out to see how thick the snow was lying. It was about four inches thick, and across the roof appeared a steady single track exactly like that made by a woman's shoe, going up to the ridge and over. She went indoors, not wishing to get

wet, and to her astonishment found her two dogs, a Golden Labrador and Staffordshire Boxer, were looking frightened and refusing to enter the kitchen. After two hours the dogs relaxed and all was peace. Two other people saw the footprints. A hundred years, almost to the day...

Finally, one last mystery. After I had written two papers for the Devonshire Association, and quoted the careful reports of the Reverend H.T. Ellacombe, I was told that the dear old chap had been seen in the vicarage drive. I asked, rather sceptically, how in the world he could be recognised a hundred years later and was assured that the percipient had his portrait and knew just what he looked like! I have not heard that he has been seen around since.

Document 26

Daily Mirror.
17 Jan 1983

OLD CODGERS [Letter column]

R.C. Hope, Avenue Mansions, Blackheath Grove, London SE23, writes:

The other day you re-published the old story of the "Devil's Hoofprints" - the single line of hoofprints which appeared in the snow in South Devon in 1855 - and commented that it is one of your favourite mysteries.

But there is no mystery. It never happened. It was merely a story in a newspaper, that is, a pack of lies. Standards of journalistic integrity were not as high then as they are, I hasten to add, now.

Who could possibly have followed such a trail in the snow over a hundred miles? It would have been obliterated within three hours by traffic of people and animals.

Oh, certainly there was a single line of prints - on the front lawn of a town-bred parson.

A naturalist identified one of the prints as that of the hind foot of a badger - and that is what it was. Other "reports" from other townies in the circulation area of the paper were probably of other animals.

The explanation is that most animals when walking on a yielding surface such as snow instinctively place each foot in line with their

nose, carefully testing each step.

They then place the rear paw in the print of the opposite forepaw as it is raised. It is beautiful to watch.

I feel sure the naturalist who identified the print would have mentioned this fact, but, of course, it didn't get into the paper.

** Well, it's got into this one now, friend - thanks for spoiling a good yarn!*

Document 27

Daily Mirror.

2 February 1983

Graham (full name and address supplied) writes from Slough, Berks:

Allow me to offer an explanation of the single trail of hoofprints which mysteriously appeared in the snow one February night in 1855. The answer to the mystery can be found in the lore of the true Romany gypsy.

For many reasons the Romanies do not like to be associated with those we know as Didikais or Pikies and at that time, 1855, the latter had usurped an area of Somerset formerly used only by Romanies. Didikais are highly superstitious, part of their belief being that at certain times the Devil walks abroad.

It was this belief that the Romanies used to frighten off the Didikais. That trail of hoofprints indicated that something had been "out and about" the previous night.

Was it the Devil? Well, all the Didikais and Pikies in Somerset thought so, and promptly left the area.

In fact the prints had been made by Romanies. Attaching some sort of shoe to the base of ladders, after much practise they got a uniform length of stride and by extending the ladders were able to get the prints over roofs and haystacks.

The whole exercise had been planned for some time and involved fifteen different Romany camps.

This idea of using the Devil to clear an area of Didikais has been used since, but never on such a large scale. [26]

** Granted such a ruse would have put the fear of the Devil into the Didikais, Graham. But how the Devil did the Romanies manage it without leaving tell-tale marks of human handiwork in the snow?*

Document 28

Daily Mirror. 18

Feb 1983

Danny Smith, who describes himself as "Travelling Gentleman, County of Hertfordshire", writes:

Graham, the reader who suggested that the mystery footprints which appeared in the snow one February night in 1855 were the work of gypsies, was right. As he said, Didikais and Pikies had been giving the true Romanies a bad name in the area.

So a meeting of seven Romany tribes was called and they drew up a plan to teach the Didikais a lesson.

The whole operation took fifteen months to prepare - walking over the route, getting to know the local people and their habits, allotting various jobs to different Romany camps and so on.

Came the night of February 8, 1855 - the Night of the Mulo (Devil). The first Romanies to go out were the look-outs. Then came the stilt-treaders.

There were 400 pairs of stilts and each had a pair of hoofprints at the base. Every stilt-treader had to be fit and athletic. Each was told how far to go before handing over to the next and so on until all 400 stilt men had done their part'.

After that, a clean-up team went out, to make sure there were no tell-tale marks left to show what had gone on.

As a result of the prank neither the Didikais nor the Pikies went near that part of the country for years and February 8 was known to them as "The Night of the Mulo's Walk".

** Thanks, Danny. Four hundred sets of hoofprints not only kept the Didikais on their toes - the making of 'em must have kept the petulengroes busy, too!*

NOTES TO SECONDARY SOURCES

1 - Mention of the mysterious 'crutch stick' markings was noted by Fort [Document 38], but does not appear in contemporary reports. Its significance was obscure until the advent of the theory that the tracks were made by gypsies, at which point the *INFO Journal* drew attention to the possibility that the marks were left by stilt-walkers balancing precariously [see introductory essay and Fig. **U**]

2 - Stale. (Literally, reheated food.)

i - At the time this paper was being researched at the British Newspaper Library, Colindale, the relevant volume of the Western *Morning News* had been sent to be rebound.

4 - It has not been possible to identify this volume.

5- *Sic*. Ed.

6 - Given the similarity in phrasing with an 1855 letter to the *Illustrated London News* [Document 7], it may be that the author of this letter was the Rev. G.M. Musgrave.

7 - Again, the report of such purposeful tracks suggests a human or supernatural agent, not an animal in search of food.

8 - This important piece of evidence, albeit second hand, seems to be the only account by someone actually out and about during the night on which the footprints appeared. It seems to confirm that, in some parts of the county at least, there was indeed a thaw capable of distorting existing trails.

9 - This reference, apparently to other mystery tracks in Devon, is never elaborated on. A detailed search of the local press for 1921 might be rewarding, but has not been attempted for this paper.

10 - See document 3.

11 - John Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols., London, 1849. This report has obvious folkloric overtones and probably little in common with the "Devil's Hoof-prints".

12 - See document 39.

13 - This headline appeared in the *Western Times*, 24 February 1855, according to Theo Brown. See document 25.

14 - See document 11.

15 - See document 22.

16 - Further evidence of a thaw, followed by more freezing weather - this time first-hand; see note 8.

17 - Roughly, 'the manner of the footprints'.

18 - Wooden-soled overshoes.

19 - See documents 14 and 30.

20 - See document 9.

21 - See documents 15-19.

22 - See document 40.

23 - See document 15.

24 - See document 8.

25 - Or Fische; see document 11.

26 - See also document 48.

OTHER MYSTERIOUS TRACKS

Document 29

Inverness Courier. 1
March 1855

MYSTERIOUS FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW. - Some curiosity and superstitious alarm were felt here before the thaw commenced by the discovery of foot-prints in the snow, exactly resembling those described to have been seen in Devonshire, as if some unknown animal with a single foot and cloven hoof, had traversed in a straight line miles of hill and dale, deterred by no difficulties of ascent, declivity, or hedges. *The Illustrated*

London News devoted a long description and an engraving to the foot-prints. Those seen in this neighbourhood were traced for a considerable way across the fields, and at the Longman [1], and again at the Crown, near the house of Abertarff [2]. Many of our townsmen went to see the phenomenon, and one brought home a lump of the snow in which the footprints were strongly impressed, exhibiting it as a very curious and mysterious occurrence. The cloven hoof had an ominous and by no means prepossessing look! Fortunately, however, an observant naturalist had already examined the foot-prints and decided the point. Some animal, probably a hare or a polecat, had traversed the field at a gallop •with its feet close together. The paws had

become slightly filled with snow, so that only the round form was impressed, and the open space between them left a slightly-raised and pointed mark like the centre of a cloven hoof. This gentleman followed a track till on an ascending slope the animal appeared to have slackened its pace to a trot, and then left upon the snow distinct impressions of its four feet. Further on, the animal seems to have sat down on the snow, and again its four feet were distinctly traced. Nothing more was desired - the mystery was solved.

Document 30

The Illustrated London News.
17 March 1855

FOOT-PRINTS IN THE SNOW

(To the editor of the *Illustrated London News*)

I beg the favour of you to insert in your newspaper the following fact, upon the authority of a Polish Doctor in Medicine living in the neighbourhood:- On the Piashowa-gora (or Sand-hill) - a small hill on the borders of Galicia, but in Russian Poland - every year are to be seen in the snow the same foot-prints as those seen in Devonshire, in a single line round the hill, at a few inches and regular distance from each other; no mark of a beginning or end being distinguished. It is universally attributed by the inhabitants to supernatural influence. The same foot-prints are occasionally visible in the soft sand with which this bare hill is covered.

C.C.C.

Heidelberg, March 12th, 1855

Document 31

Daily Mail.
13 December 1922

A TEST FOR ELDERLY READERS

To the Editor of the *Daily Mail.*

Sir - I was living in the Cotswolds with my father during the years 1852-3. A prolonged frost and very deep snow occurred in one of those years and strange tracks were seen in the snow, passing over the roofs of houses. I remember seeing the weird spoor.

Various opinions were given, as the marks

were seen in various parts of England. The local bucolics said the devil made them. Can any of your elderly readers tell me if the matter was cleared up? SEPTUGENARIAN

Document 32

Daily Mail.
15 December 1922

MYSTERY FOOTPRINTS OF LONG AGO

To the Editor of the *Daily Mail.*

Sir - I was much interested in Septugenarian's letter regarding the mysterious foot-prints seen in the snow in the '50s, as I distinctly remember, when I was a little girl of about six years of age, my father coming in one day and telling me that the devil was about, as the marks of a cloven hoof had been seen in the snow in various parts, including the roofs of houses.

I was a very nervous child and it made a great impression on me. We were then living in a little town in Norfolk. I never heard if these marks were explained.

I was born in 1846. [3]

Document 33

Doubt [4]
No. 15, Summer 1946

Our Cover

The "devil's hoofmarks" on our cover come from HFFS Russell ... He observed them at first-hand, and this is the way he tells about it, in his letter of 2-9-16 FS: [5]

"Wonderfully, they were first seen by me, and I could hardly believe my own eyes. They were spotted on a snow-covered hill behind the Chateau de Morveau, near Everberg, which is partway between Brussels and Louvain, Belgium, at 10pm on January 10th, 1945. The snow varied from two to four feet in depth [6], and I traced the prints for half a mile in a north-westerly direction until they entered a tiny wood, or copse, where abruptly they disappeared. A thorough search of the site of the copse revealed no hole, lair or tree where anything might have concealed itself without leaving some evidence in the snow. I

then traced the prints in the opposite direction, south-easterly, for nearly two miles, crossing several fields and a small stream, [until they faded out on a hillside thick with windblown snow which had drifted over the prints for an unknown distance. But the footprints didn't reappear on the crest of this hill, nor was there any sign of them on the opposite sheltered side.

"The prints measured about 2 V2" in length by IV2" wide, were spaced in pairs directly one behind the other (see sketch), the distance between prints of one pair being about nine inches, and between two pairs twelve to fifteen inches. They ran in a dead straight line, one print immediately behind another, without slightest misplacement to left or right. Judging by their depth, whatever made them was at least the weight of an Airedale dog, a good medium-sized creature of some sort. [7]

"Due to frost, and lack of further snow, the prints remained visible for two days, during which time I drew the attention of several people to them, including one Arthur Davies, of Sheffield, Victor Beha, of London, and some local Belgians. Unfortunately, all were singularly lacking in curiosity, Beha suggesting that they'd been made by a gyroscopic rat - which is probably as good a guess as that of any dogmatic scientist. Local Belgians couldn't think what they might be, never having seen the like before. Three cameras were available, but not a film to be got for love or money, otherwise I could have got several good photographs of this phenomenon. (Films were hell on the continent - the number of useless cameras being toted about would break your heart.)

"Looked to me somewhat like the prints of a goat, and there were odd goats in that part of Belgium - but goats don't step leaving

single-line spoor. Unfortunately, the prints weren't as dramatic as Gould's - they didn't run for miles over several counties, and they didn't hop across rooftops. I remain firmly convinced that to me has been vouchsafed a sight of a typical piece of Fortean and that I've seen the inexplicable. But I wish I'd been able to photograph them as Smythe did those prints of the Abominable Snowman in the Himalayas. Anyway, there's the data, for what it's worth."

Document 34

Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.
Vol.52 p.666, 1954

Not the Snowman?

Sir,

During the hard frost at the beginning of February, publicity was given to reports of giant footprints, some 20 inches long [8], found crossing deep snow in various parts of the Isle of Wight. At the Needles they were said to lead to the edge of the 200-foot cliff with no sign of any return tracks, while at Bembridge they appeared to come from the direction of the sea and disappear inland. [9]

Reference was also made to one of the world's most baffling mysteries, recorded in February 1855, from South Devon, where similar, though much smaller, footprints said by some to be those of Satan himself, were observed covering a large area and crossing inaccessible places like the tops of houses and narrow walls as well as in open country.

I venture to put forward an explanation of their origin. During the recent heavy snowfall, and while walking about the Yarmouth-Freshwater road where the high tide had



Fig. 8 - Eric Frank Russell's drawing of the tracks he saw near Everberg, Belgium, in January 1945. From the cover of *Doubt* No. 15, Summer 1946 (Document 33).

covered the mud-flats above Yarmouth harbour, I caused numerous seagulls to take flight at my approach. As they rose from the water several of these made sudden crash-dives, repeating the performance over a considerable distance. It seemed that this was due to the frozen state of their feathers, which prevented them making any balanced or sustained flight.

Similar attempts to fly over deep snow instead of water would, I suggest, produce the effect of a series of giant footprints. A large flock of smaller birds, such as starlings, may have given rise to the Devon footprints under similar conditions. These, be it noted, were described as occurring in straight lines, unlike the tracks of a four-footed animal. [10]

I should be most interested to have the views of more experienced bird-watchers.

J.A. Douglas
Yarmouth, Isle of Wight

Document 35

Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association.

Vol.LXXXVIII (1956) pp.251-2

Fifty-Third Report on Folklore
by Theo Brown, Recorder

... Footprints in the Snow, 1855.

At Ipplepen, during a fall of snow in February, a trail of footprints was seen on the thatched roof of Penrae. This is a very old house, formerly a farm, and, traditionally, said to have been a meeting-place of Orange supporters. It is L-shaped, the short arm running back contains the kitchen, and, over it, a bedroom, with plaster-work round a bricked-up fireplace. The moulding includes the legend W M 1704 R, but the 7 and the 4 are of later date than the 1 and the 0. This is called the William and Mary Room.

One day in February, Mrs Hall went out of the house and looked up to the roof to see how thick the snow was lying on it, as the timbers were not too strong. Up the slope, over the William and Mary Room, was a track, as of a woman's shoe, about size five, heel and sole quite distinct, each print a step apart, leading up to the top of the ridge. Unfortunately, Mrs Hall did not go round to see what happened

on the other side of the roof, as it was snowing hard. It was then that she observed the strange behaviour of the dogs, who normally hang around the kitchen when she is cooking. They are: a Golden Labrador and a Staffordshire Boxer. On this occasion they refused to enter the kitchen and hung about the threshold in a frightened manner for two hours, nor would they enter by the door on the other side. After two hours the spell suddenly lifted.

There is no tradition of a ghost at Penrae, although the Labrador has been seen to mark a corner of Mrs Hall's bedroom with acute apprehension, some years ago, hackles up, and so forth.

Besides Mrs Hall, two other witnesses saw the footprints.

Document 36

Tomorrow.

Volume 5 Number 3, Spring 1957

Did The Devil Walk Again?

by Eric J Dingwall

Of all the strange stories to which I have listened for so many years, that told by Mr Wilson was one of the oddest and the most inexplicable. Indeed, Mr Wilson himself was so completely bewildered by his extraordinary experience that he had only confided it to three highly trusted friends, a canon of the Church, a doctor and a customs officer. The thing was impossible. It could not have happened. And yet Mr Wilson knew that it had happened and that it had happened to him.

One day when Mr Wilson was quietly reading his newspaper by the fire his heart began to beat more quickly. So he had not been the only one! Others had had the same strange experience and could no more explain it than he could. Now at least people could not say that he was lying, mad or suffering from delusions.

So it happened that he wrote off to me, since my name was mentioned in the article he had read, and in careful, soberly-phrased terms he told me his story. I confess that my own interest in it almost exceeded his own and so at the first opportunity I hastened

down to the little village where Mr Wilson carries on his business.

I found him in a little office. He was a tall, well-built man with a kindly smile and an assured manner, obviously no imaginative dreamer of tall stories.

When we had made ourselves comfortable Mr Wilson began to tell me something about himself and his history. He had not always lived in a village, where he had now built up for himself a neat little business. Years before he had been the proprietor of a flourishing concern in New York, but after the Wall Street crash he had lost a good deal of money and decided to return to England. At first he found himself working for others but, being a man of sturdy independence, he finally set up on his own. And it was when taking a short holiday at a West coast watering place where he had spent his childhood that *it* happened.

It was in 1950, Mr Wilson said, that he went down to the West country to stay in the Devonshire coast town where he had spent so many happy days of his youth. Never could he forget that holiday as long as he lived, for it was on the last day of his stay that he decided on impulse to go and look at his old home and walk again on the beach where he had played in his childhood years. This little beach is entirely enclosed by rocks and steep cliffs and is invisible from above. The only trace is by a passage through the cliffs which is closed by a tall iron gate. This gate is used as a pay gate in summer and is locked up in winter. On that October afternoon the gate was locked, but Mr Wilson's old home was almost opposite the gate and he remembered that it was possible to get round the gate by going through the garden of the house. So he did this, and was soon on the sands of the beach, which was deserted and gloomy on that autumn day [11]. The sea had been to the top of the beach but now the tide had gone out, leaving the sand as smooth as glass. Mr Wilson looked at the sand and could hardly believe his eyes. For starting at the top of the beach and just below the perpendicular cliff was a long single line of marks, apparently hoof-marks of some biped, which were clearly impressed upon the wet sand almost as if cut out by some sharp instrument. The marks were about six feet apart and led from the cliff in a straight line down the centre of the narrow beach [12] and

into the sea. [13]

Mr Wilson's first reaction seems to have been intense curiosity. He approached the prints and examined them with the most careful attention. He tried to jump from one mark to another and then, removing his shoes and socks, tried to see if he could match them with his own stride. But they were so far apart that he could not reach from one to the next, although he was a tall man with long legs. The hoof-marks which were not cloven, resembled those which might have been made by a large, unshod pony, and the impressions were deeper than those which he himself made with his shoes on, even though he weighed some sixteen stone. What he particularly noticed at the time was that no sand was splashed up at the edges: it looked as if each mark had been cut out of the sand with a flat iron. [14]

Totally Inexplicable

After Mr. Wilson had told me his story and had seen that I treated it seriously, as the three others had, and showed no inclination to disbelieve him, he went on to tell me how, after examining the footprints, he had realized how totally inexplicable they were. For here was a biped with a track shaped like a hoof, starting immediately beneath a perpendicular cliff on a closed beach and ending in the sea. There was no returning track. I asked if it were possible that the animal, or whatever it might have been, could have turned right or left in the sea and regained the land at some other point. But Mr. Wilson produced photographs which showed that the beach was a comparatively narrow space completely enclosed by rocky headlands on either side. What possible creature, from land or water, could have made such footprints as these? And what size could it have been to have so long a stride? What kind of hoof could make so clear-cut an impression? As Mr. Wilson said, what might he have seen if he had arrived a little earlier, for the receding tide was only just beyond the last print of the line? After asking himself questions such as these, Mr. Wilson wondered if perhaps there was something uncanny about the footprints. For were it a sea animal why should it be provided with hard hoofs? If it were a land animal why should it walk into the sea and where did it go when it got there?

Or did it have wings? In any case, what known animal could make such a track?

Questions very like these had been asked before, and it was just because Mr. Wilson had accidentally come across a reference to another case of mysterious tracks that he had written to me. For just over a hundred years ago - in 1855 to be precise - there had been a night of heavy snow fall in the neighbourhood of Exeter and southwards into Devon, and when the countryfolk awoke a strange sight met their eyes. For there upon the snow were odd foot-tracks resembling hoof marks, which seemed to be those of a biped rather than those of any four-footed creature. Each mark was about eight inches ahead of the next and the prints were so widely distributed over a large area that it seemed that more than one creature must have been involved. But what was still more mysterious was the route taken by this animal. The prints were not only on the ground but also on the roofs of houses, on the tops of walls and even on enclosed areas like courtyards.

The prints caused the utmost concern and consternation and discussion about them raged in the press for several weeks. Every kind of animal was suggested and then rejected. Some thought the tracks were made by badgers or by birds; others thought that an escaped kangaroo was responsible, or possibly a racoon. Gradually the excitement died down and the villagers were no longer frightened to come out of their cottages for fear that Satan himself would again be walking. And so the devil's hoofmarks remained an unsolved mystery.

It was not till 1908 that the strange footprints were seen again, this time in the United States, from Newark to Cape May in New Jersey [15]. Here again were reports of marks like the hoofs of a pony in the thick snow, and again we have the story of how the tracks led up to wire fences and then continued on the other side, even when the uprights were only a few inches apart. No solution seems to have been reached and eventually the New Jersey Devil was forgotten, just like his predecessor in the Devon country-side.

What are we to make of these stories and what was it that made the strange prints that so astonished Mr. Wilson on that October

afternoon? The more questions one asks the more baffling does the case become. There may be a simple explanation for this experience, just as there may be for the two or three previous cases reported, of which Mr. Wilson knew nothing. So far no one has thought of one. If anyone does, no one will be more happy than my friend Mr. Wilson, and those who hear his story will not be tempted to think that, on a Devon beach in 1950, he had all but seen the Devil walking again.

Document 37

Daily Mirror. 7
Feb 1983

OLD CODGERS [Letter column]

Chilling

Mrs L[ynda]. Hanson, Desmond Avenue, High Road, Hull, Humberside, writes:

The theories about the mystery footprints in the snow in 1855 have been of great interest to me because similar footprints appeared in our garden when I was a child, in the 1950s.

The prints were some 4 inches across, shaped as a cloven hoof, and appeared 12 inches apart in a single line - stopping in the middle of the garden [16]. No snow had been disturbed anywhere.

What was also interesting was that at the bottom of the print, dry concrete could be seen, not compressed snow as is normal when a person or animal treads on snow. [17]

This has intrigued our family for years.

* *We're not surprised, ma'am - reckon we'd 'ave made tracks ourselves next day.*

[Responding to a personal letter from Bob Rickard, editor of *Fortean Times*, Mrs Hanson added:]

"The hoof-marks appeared in my parents' garden in January or February 1957. It had snowed about 1" deep during the night and in the morning the marks were discovered.

"They were shaped as a cloven hoof, 4" across, approx 12" apart in a straight line and stopping in the middle of the garden... At that time we had a very good house dog, but he never even barked."

NOTES TO OTHER FOOTPRINTS

- 1 - Now Inverness industrial estate.
- 2 - A residential area close to Inverness Royal Academy.
- 3 - This puts the date of the incident at c.1852.
- 4 - The sporadically-published journal of the Fortean Society, edited in New York by Tiffany Thayer.
- 5 - Or 9 February 1946. Thayer's Fortean Society adopted a 13-month calendar dating from the group's inception (1931), and with the 13th month, Fort, slotted between August and September. HFFS, a title awarded to Russell, stands for "Honorary Fellow of the Fortean Society". The author's actual full name was Eric Frank Russell, the noted science-fiction author; he was for many years British correspondent of *Doubt* and was author of the book *Great World Mysteries* (1957), in which another account of these prints appears. See document 44.
- 6 - Compare this with the very thin covering of snow - 'A to 4 inches - in Devon on the night of the Devil's walk.
- 7 - This compares with Devon's single track left by a foot approximately 4 inches by 2 3/4, 8Vi inches apart.
- 8 - A size that puts one in mind more of an Abominable Snow man than a devil. For another size comparison, see Document 36.
- 9 - Rupert Gould [see Document 39], himself a naval officer, was among the first to draw attention to the possibility that the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by a sea creature. Those left in Devon were generally within easy reach of the coast, while whatever made the prints on Kerguelen island, Gould believed, must have come from the sea. This datum lends slight support to what otherwise appears a peculiar theory.
- 10 - However, one would expect the take-off attempts of a flock of stricken birds to leave a much less regular trail than that reported in Devon.
- 11 - The isolation of the beach, and the unplanned nature of Wilson's visit, appear to make a hoax unlikely.
- 12 - The implication is that the prints were in a single file, as were the Devil's Hoofmarks.
- 13 - The possibility of a link between Devon's hoofmarks and the sea was pointed out by Gould. See Document 39.
- 14 - Compare this with reports that the Devil's Hoofmarks were so clear they appeared to have been branded with a hot iron [Document 7], and with Eric Frank Russell's 1945 report of the mysterious displacement of snow in the hoofmarks he examined in Belgium [see Documents 33 and 44].
- 15 - These marks were associated with the fabulous Jersey Devil - a bat-winged, horse-headed and hooved improbable reported in New Jersey's Pine Barrens at the time. See James McCloy and Ray Miller, *The Jersey Devil* (Waflingford, Pennsylvania 1976); Loren Coleman, *Mysterious America* (Winchester, Mass., 1983).
- 16 - A very fair approximation of the prints in Devon a century earlier, with the exception of the slightly longer stride.
- 17 - See note 14.

SELECTED ESSAYS AND THEORIES

Document 38

THE BOOK OF THE DAMNED
by Charles Fort
pp.305-310 of the Dover collected edition
(New York 1974)

Notes and Queries, 7-8-508:

A correspondent who had been to Devonshire writes for information as to a story that he had heard there: of an occurrence of about thirty-five years before the date of writing:

Of snow upon the ground - of all South Devonshire waking up one morning to find

such tracks in the snow as had never before been heard of - "clawed footmarks" of "an unclassifiable form" - alternating at huge but regular intervals with what seemed to be the impression of the point of a stick - but the scattering of the prints - amazing expanse of territory covered - obstacles, such as hedges, walls, houses, seemingly surmounted -

Intense excitement - that the track had been followed by huntsmen and hounds, until they had come to a forest - from which the hounds had retreated, baying and terrified, so that no one had dared to enter the forest.

Notes and Queries, 7-9-18:

Whole occurrence well-remembered by a correspondent: a badger had left marks in the snow: this was determined, and the excite-

ement had "dropped to a dead calm in a single day."

Notes and Queries, 7-9-70:

That for years a correspondent had had a tracing of the prints, which his mother had taken from those in the snow in her garden, in Exmouth: that they were hoof-like marks - but had been made by a biped.

Notes and Queries, 7-9-253:

Well remembered by another correspondent, who writes of the excitement and consternation of "some classes." He says that a kangaroo had escaped from a menagerie - "the footprints being so peculiar and far apart gave rise to a scare that the devil was loose."

We have had a story, and now we shall tell it over from contemporaneous sources. We have had the later accounts first very largely for an impression of the correlating effect that time brings about, by addition, disregard and distortion. For instance, the "dead calm in a single day." If I had found that the excitement did die out rather soon, I'd incline to accept that nothing extraordinary had occurred.

I found that the excitement had continued for weeks.

I recognize this as a well-adapted thing to say, to divert attention from a discorrelate.

All phenomena are "explained" in the terms of the Dominant of their era. This is why we give up trying really to explain, and content ourselves with expressing. Devils that might print marks in snow are correlates to the third Dominant back from this era. So it was an adjustment by nineteenth-century correlates, or human tropisms, to say that the marks in the snow were clawed. Hoof-like marks are not only horsey but devilish. It had to be said in the nineteenth century that those prints showed claw-marks. We shall see that this was stated by Prof. Owen, one of the greatest biologists of his day - except that Darwin didn't think so. But I shall give reference to two representations of them that can be seen in the New York Public Library. In neither representation is there the faintest suggestion of a claw-mark. There never has been a Prof. Owen who has explained: he has correlated. [1]

Another adaptation, in the later accounts, is that of leading this discorrelate to the Old Dominant into the familiar scenery of a fairy story, and discredit it by assimilation to the

conventionally fictitious - so the idea of the baying, terrified hounds, and forest like enchanted forests, which no one dared to enter. Hunting parties were organized, but the baying, terrified hounds do not appear in contemporaneous accounts.

The story of the kangaroo looks like adaptation to needs for an animal that could spring far, because marks were found in the snow on roofs of houses. But so astonishing is the extent of snow that was marked that after a while another kangaroo was added.

But the marks were in single lines.

My own acceptance is that not less than a thousand one-legged kangaroos, each shod with a very small horseshoe, could have marked that snow of Devonshire.

London *Times*, Feb 16, 1855:

"Considerable sensation has been caused in the towns of Topsham, Lymphstone [2], Exmouth, Teignmouth, and Dawlish, in Devonshire, in consequence of the discovery of a vast number of foot tracks of a most strange and mysterious description."

The story is of an incredible multiplicity of marks discovered in the morning of Feb 8, 1855, in the snow, by the inhabitants of many towns and regions between towns. This great area must of course be disregarded by Prof. Owen and the other correlators. The tracks were in all kinds of unaccountable places: in gardens enclosed by high walls, and up on the tops of houses, as well as in the open fields. There was in Lymphstone scarcely one unmarked garden. We've had heroic disregards but I think that here disregard was titanic. And, because they occurred in single lines, the marks are said to have been "more like those of a biped than of a quadruped" - as if a biped would place one foot precisely ahead of another - unless it hopped - but then we have to think of a thousand, or of thousands.

It is said that the marks were "generally 8 inches in advance of each other."

"The impression of the foot closely resembles that of a donkey's shoe, and measured from an inch and a half, in some instances, to two and a half inches across."

Or the impressions were cones in incomplete, or crescentic basins.

The diameters equalled diameters of very young colts' hoofs: too small to be compared

with marks of donkey's hoofs.

"On Sunday last the Rev. Mr. Musgrave alluded to the subject in his sermon and suggested the possibility of the footprints being those of a kangaroo, but this could scarcely have been the case, as they were found on both sides of the Este [3]. At present it remains a mystery, and many superstitious people in the above-named towns are actually afraid to go outside their doors after night."

The Este is a body of water two miles wide.

London *Times*, March 6, 1855:

[Here Fort quotes at length from Document 12.]

In the *Illustrated London News*, the occurrence is given a great deal of space. In the issue of Feb. 24, 1855, a sketch is given of the prints.

I call them cones in incomplete basins.

Except that they're a little longish, they look like prints of hoofs of horses - or, rather, of colts.

But they're in a single line.

It is said that the marks from which the sketch was made were 8 inches apart, and that this spacing was regular and invariable "in every parish." Also other towns besides those named in the *Times* are mentioned. The writer, who had spent a winter in Canada, and was familiar with tracks in snow, says that he had never seen "a more clearly defined track." Also he brings out the point that was so persistently disregarded by Prof. Owen and the other correlators - that "no known animal walks in a line of single footsteps, not even man." With these wider inclusions, this writer concludes with us that the marks were not footprints. It may be that his following observation hits upon the crux of the whole occurrence:

That whatever it may have been that had made the marks, it had removed, rather than pressed, the snow. [4]

According to his observations the snow looked "as if branded with a hot iron."

Illustrated London News March 3, 1855-214:

Prof. Owen, to whom a friend had sent drawings of the prints, writes that there were claw-marks. He says that the "track" was made by "a" badger.

Six other witnesses sent letters to this number of the *News*. One mentioned, but not published, is a notion of a strayed swan. Always this homogeneous-seeing - "a" badger - "a" swan - "a" track. I should have listed the other towns as well as those mentioned in the *Times*.

A letter from Mr. Musgrave is published. He, too, sends a sketch of the prints. It, too, shows a single line. There are four prints, of which the third is a little out of line.

There is no sign of a claw-mark.

The prints look like prints of longish hoofs of a very young colt, but they are not so definitely outlined as in the sketch of February 24th, as if drawn after disturbance by wind, or after thawing had set in. Measurements at places a mile and a half apart, gave the same inter-spacing - "exactly eight inches and a half apart."

We now have a little study in the psychology and genesis of an attempted correlation. Mr. Musgrave says: "I found a very apt opportunity to mention the name 'kangaroo' in allusion to the report then current." He says that he had no faith in the kangaroo-story himself, but was glad "that a kangaroo was in the wind," because it opposed "a dangerous, degrading, and false impression that it was the devil."

"Mine was a word in season and did good."

Whether it's Jesuitical or not, and no matter what it is or isn't, that is our own acceptance: that, though we've often been carried away from this attitude controversially, that is our acceptance as to every correlate of the past that has been considered in this book - relatively to the Dominant of its era.

Another correspondent writes that, though the prints in all cases resembled hoof marks, there were indistinct traces of claws - that "an" otter had made the marks. After that many other witnesses wrote to the *News*. The correspondence was so great that, in the issue of March 10th, only a selection could be given. There's "a" jumping-rat solution and "a" hopping-toad inspiration, and then someone came out strong with an idea of "a" hare that had galloped with pairs of feet held close together, so as to make impressions in a single line.

London *Times*, March 14, 1840: "Among the high mountains of that elevated district where Glenorchy, Glenlyon and Glenochay are contiguous, there have been met with several times, during this and also the former winter, upon the snow, the tracks of an animal seemingly unknown at present in Scotland. The print, in every respect, is an exact resemblance to that of a foal of considerable size, with this small difference, perhaps, that the sole seems a little longer, or not so round; but as no one has had the good fortune as yet to have obtained a glimpse of this creature, nothing more can be said of its shape or dimensions; only it has been remarked, from the depth to which the feet sank in the snow, that it must be a beast of considerable size. It has been observed also that its walk is not like that of the generality of quadrupeds, but that it is more like the bounding or leaping of a horse when scared or pursued. It is not in one locality that its tracks have been met with, but through a range of at least twelve miles."

In the *Illustrated London News*, March 17, 1855, a correspondent from Heidelberg writes, "upon the authority of a Polish Doctor of Medicine," that, on the Piashowa-gora (Sand Hill) a small elevation on the border of Galicia, but in Russian Poland, such marks are to be seen in the snow every year, and sometimes in the sand of this hill, and "are attributed by the inhabitants to supernatural influences."

Document 39

ODDITIES

A Book of Unexplained Facts by
Rupert Gould (London 1929,
1943)

THE DEVIL'S HOOF-MARKS

A Scottish minister once preached a sermon upon the text "The voice of the turtle is heard in our land" [5]. He was literally-minded, and unaware of the fact that the "turtle" referred to is the turtle-dove, and not that member of the *Chelonia* which inhabits the ocean and furnishes the raw material of such "tortoise-shell" articles as are not made of celluloid. In consequence, the deductions

which he drew from his text were long remembered by such of his hearers as were better-informed.

"We have here", he is reported to have said - "we have here, my brethren, two very remarkable signs and portents distinctly vouchsafed to us. The first shall be, that a creature which (like Leviathan himself) was created to dwell and abide in the sea shall make its way to the land, and be seen in the markets and dwelling-places of men; and the second shall be, that a creature hitherto denied the gift of speech shall lift up its voice in the praise of its Maker."

A visitation of a somewhat similar and hardly less startling kind occurred in Devonshire on February 8, 1855. The following account of it was published in *The Times* of February 16th.

[See Document 2]

So far and, unfortunately, no further - *The Times*. The *Illustrated London News*, however, took up the question, and opened its columns to what proved to be quite an extensive correspondence, which I have used as the source of most of the information here given. In the West Country the affair gradually blew over - although I believe that it is still well remembered. There was no repetition of the occurrence, but it took a long time for the "excitement" and "superstitious folly" to die down. One correspondent [6] speaks of "labourers, their wives and children, and old crones, and trembling old men, dreading to stir out after sunset, or to go half a mile into lanes or byways on a call or message, under the conviction that this was the Devil's walk, and no other, and that it was wicked to trifle with such a manifest proof of the Great Enemy's immediate presence..."

The correspondence presents, as might be expected, a curious medley of additional facts and half-baked theories. I will first summarise the facts, premising that *The Times* account, while giving a good outline of the events, necessarily omitted one or two very curious details.

An eye-witness, signing himself "South Devon", sent in an able account, from which the following extract is taken.

[See Document 7]

Another correspondent, signing himself "G.M.M.", also afforded a good deal of supplementary information, as the following extracts will show.

[See Document 11]

In view of the very remarkable facts detailed in these letters, it will be admitted that the Devonshire rustics had every excuse for indulging in what their betters were pleased to term "superstitious folly". A natural explanation of the facts seemed impossible to find, and difficult even to suggest; while any explanation certainly postulated the visit of something very uncanny - something which walked upon small hooved feet with a very short, mincing stride, which sought darkness and solitude, which had never rested, which had crossed a river two miles wide, which had hung round human habitations without daring to enter them, and which had on some occasions walked up walls and along roofs, while at other times it had passed through such obstructions as if they did not exist. Assuredly the peasants were not to be blamed if their minds went back to such grim texts as Isaiah xxxiv.14:

"The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow."

Of course, many naturalistic explanations were offered, but none can be regarded as satisfactory. In the words of Maginn's Aunciente Waggonere,

Somme swore itte was ane foreigne birds,
Some sayd itte was ane brute....

The various candidates who, by their "next friend", claimed the authorship of the marks comprised (among birds) cranes, swans, bustards, and waders; and (among beasts) otters, rats, hares, polecats, frogs, badgers, and - *mimbile dictu* [7] - kangaroos.

The theory that a bird made the marks is obviously untenable, as "South Devon" pointed out. But an anonymous writer, one "W.W." [8], made a pathetic attempt to evade the various fatal objections. By his account, five days after the appearance of the Devonshire hoof-marks a swan turned up, alive but

exhausted, at St. Denis in France, wearing a silver collar "with an inscription engraved on it, stating that the bird belonged to the domain of Prince Hohenlohe, in Germany". "W.W." maintained that this bird, whose feet had probably been "padded in the shape of a donkey's hoof or shoe" by its owner, to prevent damage to the garden in which it was normally kept, had no doubt made the mysterious marks!

Some of the other theories were ingenious. For example, one Thomas Fox sent in a very clever drawing to support his view that the marks had been made by the four feet of a leaping rat [see Fig. 9a]. There was a good deal, too, to be said for the otter theory. But the opinion most generally accepted was, of course, that put forward by the famous naturalist Richard Owen.

Here is his letter.

[See Document 11]

In the mid-Victorian era, that "period of digestion", the authority of an established name counted, in scientific as in other matters, for more than it does now. Probably all but a very few, such as the unfortunate observers who saw something different from what Owen so clearly tells them they ought to have seen, regarded this letter as absolutely decisive.

Nowadays, we know a little more about scientific dogmatism - and we also know a good deal more about Owen himself. He was, undoubtedly, a very able man; but on several important occasions he showed himself capable of making dogmatic assertions, in defiance of fact, which proved him to be possessed of a singular and not entirely "scientific" type of mind.

A good example of this tendency is his controversy with Huxley, in 1857, over the *hippocampus major*. Owen, coming forward "on the side of the angels" as the great scientific gun of the anti-Darwinians, committed himself to the dogmatic assertion that there were certain anatomical features - such as the above singularly-named structure - which were peculiar to the brain of man, and afforded ample ground for classifying him as a genus apart from all other mammals. Actually, as Huxley soon afterwards showed, such struc-

tures are common both to man and to all the higher apes, as well as many of the lower ones.

Proxime accesserunt [9] may be placed Owen's exploded theory that the adult skull is a modified vertebral joint - a theory originally suggested by Oken - and his utterly childish "explanation" of the "sea-serpent" seen by H.M.S. *Daedalus* in 1848: an explanation flatly contradicting the observed facts, and postulating that the naval officers who observed them were, one and all, half-witted.

His explanation of the Devonshire hoof-prints is more plausible; but it does not fit the facts - nor is he fair to "your correspondent". "South Devon" nowhere stated, as Owen asserts, that man is the only creature which makes single foot-prints in snow - he said that no creature, not even man, makes a single line of prints: and this is generally true [10]. It is quite possible that the prints of a badger's hind-foot might be superimposed on the last impression but one made by the fore-foot on the same side of the body, and so produce an apparently single foot-print. But such prints would undoubtedly be "staggered", for the badger has quite a wide "tread", and the result would then be a double line of imprints, not a single one. Badgers, also, are not commonly credited with the ability to scale walls and walk along roofs. As between the claims of the badger and the otter, the latter certainly seem better founded.

In [Figure 9] I have drawn foot-prints of a badger and an otter for comparison with the Devonshire hoof-marks. It will be admitted that the resemblance is not striking. It is only fair, however, to say that one or two of the writers to the *Illustrated London News* stated that faint traces of claws had, as Owen remarks, been seen, or imagined, at the edges of the hoof-marks. [11]

And Owen was entirely right in questioning the assertion that one creature had made all the marks. If, as alleged, they extended for something like a hundred miles, it is in the last degree unlikely that this track, while it endured, could have been traced throughout its whole extent by a competent observer. And even if we reduce its length to a minimum of some forty miles only, the application of simple arithmetic is still fatal to the hypothesis of a single creature. Allowing this

fourteen hours of darkness in which to make a 40-mile line of hoof-marks 8 inches apart, it must have kept up an average of more than six steps per second from start to finish! [12] And that is the absolute minimum - an addition of 30% for loopings and turnings, which seems reasonable enough, would necessitate the creature's taking ten steps per second for fourteen hours continuously. This, I submit, is simply unthinkable. The conclusion that more than one creature made the hoof-marks naturally follows - a conclusion, unfortunately, which neither explains the marks away nor identifies their authors. And it is worth noting that, on this supposition, "South Devon's" estimate of 100 miles for the total length of the track may easily have been below the truth.

Another naturalist, Frank Buckland, in spite of being one of Owen's disciples and admirers, rejected his "badger" theory - going further and faring worse. Writing long after the event he gravely asserted (in his *Log-Book of a Naturalist*) that the hoof-marks had been *proved* to be the track of a racoon! He must have been grossly misinformed. Besides possessing all the physical handicaps which put Owen's badgers out of court, the racoon adds one of its own - it is not a native of this country. In effect, Buckland was informing his readers that a pack of escaped racoons, arriving and departing with utter secrecy, had wandered singly, for one night only, over a large area of Devonshire - acquiring, during their excursion, the difficult and previously-unsuspected accomplishment of walking up vertical walls and through haystacks.

But, putting aside the reported facts which are inexplicable on any naturalistic theory (such as the unobstructed passage of the tracks through walls, etc.), there is a crucial objection which appears to me to dispose of the claims not only of the badger and the otter, but of all the birds and animals supposed, by someone or other, to have made the mysterious marks. I except the kangaroo - that theory does not require serious discussion. It was only mooted, originally, because the private menagerie of a Mr. Fishe, at Sidmouth, contained a couple of these animals.

The objection is this. We can be quite certain, from the alarm the hoofmarks occasioned among the rustics, that they were most

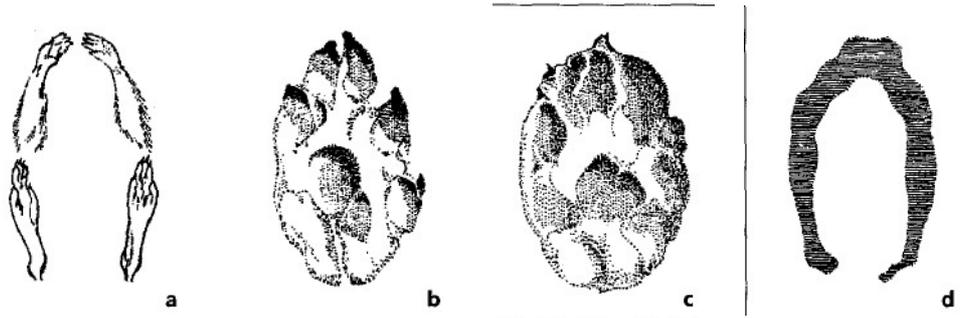


Fig.9 - Illustrations from Rupert Gould, *Oddities* (Document 39), comparing (a) Thomas Fox's rat tracks, (b) an otter's hind foot, (c) a badger's hind foot, and (d) one of the Hoofmarks.

unusual - that nothing like them had ever been seen within living memory. It is therefore indisputable that they were not made by any common, well-known, creatures [13]. If such had been the case - if, for example, they had been the foot-prints of badgers or otters - they would have been seen in Devonshire every winter. Instead of being a nine days' wonder, and scaring the feebler brethren into fits, they would have been looked upon as a perfectly familiar sight, not worth a second glance. Yet, with one exception, there is no record of such marks having been seen on any other occasion before or since. [14]

Unbeknown, apparently, to the correspondents of the *Illustrated London News*, a very similar case had occurred some fifteen years earlier, in a very different part of the world. The story had been published for eight years; but it is a curious fact that while the authority for it, Captain Sir James Clark Ross, R.N., was in England in 1855 and must, one would think, have heard of the Devonshire hoofmarks, he did not, apparently, direct attention to the very similar incident which was within his own knowledge.

The following is an extract from Ross's *Voyage of Discovery and Research in the Southern and Antarctic Regions*, vol. i. p. 87. His ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror* [15], were then at Kerguelen Island, a large subantarctic island in the Southern Indian Ocean. The date is May 1840.

"Of land animals we saw none; and the only traces we could discover of there being any on this island were the singular foot-steps of a pony or ass, found by the party detached for surveying purposes, under the command

of Lieutenant Bird, and described by Dr. Robertson as 'being 3 inches in length and 2% in breadth, having a small and deeper depression on each side, and shaped like a horseshoe.'

"It is by no means improbable that the animal has been cast on shore from some wrecked vessel. They traced its footsteps for some distance in the recently fallen snow, in hopes of getting a sight of it, but lost the tracks on reaching a large space of rocky ground which was free from snow."

One wonders, if they had "got a sight of it", what they would have seen. [16]

It is scarcely a far-fetched conjecture to suppose that the creature which made the "singular foot-steps" seen by Ross was akin to those whose tracks were observed in Devonshire. If we accept this, one or two conclusions seem to follow.

The Kerguelen creature was not a denizen of Kerguelen itself - at least, what we now know of the fauna of that island makes this exceedingly improbable. Presumably, then, it made its arrival from seaward. Either, as Ross suggests, it was a survivor from some wrecked vessel, or it was a sea-creature which, for some reason, had made an excursion on land. As to what manner of sea-creature it may have been, if it was one, I offer no opinion. The available selection is wider than might be at first supposed - it may be recalled that some years ago a seal was found halfway up a Scottish mountain, and miles from the sea. The locale of the Devonshire hoof-marks points to a similar conclusion. All the places mentioned by name lie close to the sea-coast or to the estuary of the Exe.

On the other hand, it is possible that in both cases the agents were land animals - presumably tropical land-animals [17]. The appearance of their foot-prints in snow would normally be a matter of inference, rather than observation, while they would never, except by a rare accident, be observed in either of the temperate zones. Land-animals swimming ashore from a ship would naturally seek for food - and, if timid, might easily cover a very considerable distance in a single night, and hang round buildings without daring to enter them.

On either supposition, it is possible that there is some quite simple solution of the Devonshire hoof-marks to be found, if one knew where to look for it. But there is a caveat to be entered. If land-animals made the marks, the available data are probably sufficient to enable a competent zoologist, with an unbiased mind, to make a reasonable suggestion as to their identity. But no authority on earth - not even the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries - can set limits to the number and variety of the creatures which, even though unknown to science, may yet live and move and have their being in the sea.

Document 40

Chamber's Journal.

December 1953, pp.745-6

Last Run

New light on the Abominable Snowman

J. Allan Rennie

The mysterious Abominable Snowman keeps well his hold on public interest. As far back as 8th February 1855 we find a great old stir being caused by the appearance of his tracks at Dawlish and Teignmouth, in Devon. These were bilobal, in the shape of a large cloven hoof, and they negotiated roof-tops and high walls with a complete contempt for obstacles of any form. *The Times* featured the occurrence, the *Illustrated London News* published sketches and eye-witness accounts, while the local pulpits thundered that Satan was abroad, on the business of claiming his own.

All sorts of weird theories were put

forward as an explanation for these tracks, the blame being laid on creatures ranging from a kangaroo to some gigantic bird hitherto unknown to science, but the fact remains that not a single one of these solutions was other than ridiculous, and even less worthy of credence than the views of those who held the tracks to be of supernatural origin.

In my own part of the world, the Cairngorm country and Strathspey, there is a tradition of long standing concerning a local Abominable Snowman called the Bodach Mor MacDubh, or 'Giant Old Man of MacDuff's Mountain' [18], and I was reminded of the many tales I had heard relating to him when, on 2nd December 1952, while walking about a mile from the village of Cromdale, I came across tracks every bit as mysterious as those observed almost a hundred years before in Devon.

They were running across a stretch of snow-covered moorland. Each print was 19 inches long, by about 14 inches wide, bilobal in shape, and there must have been all of seven feet between each 'stride'. There was, however, no differentiation between a right and left foot, and they proceeded in more or less a single line.

I followed the tracks for about half-a-mile, until they terminated at the foot of a pine, for all the world as though the strange creature making them had climbed up into the foliage of the tree. Yet they did not end here, for about 20 yards further on, in the adjoining patch of arable, I picked them up again. They traversed the little white field, plunged down the hill to the river's edge, and disappeared directly opposite the village churchyard. What a perfect point of vanishment for an Abominable Snowman!

The sun was dipping low towards the horizon, and I took to my heels and ran, not, I am almost ashamed to admit, from any superstition, but because I wanted to get a camera and take a picture of those tracks before the light went. In this, I am glad to say, I was successful, and as soon as the pictures were printed I showed them to several local people, including gamekeepers and ghillies. I noted the light of uneasiness in the eyes of some as they studied the photographs, and the puzzlement in others. One ghillic stated

bluntly that they were *Bodach* tracks, while others could not make any guess as to their origin.

I will confess that I should have been equally baffled but for a rather unique experience that came my way about thirty years ago.

In 1924 I was working with an exploration party in Northern Canada. One day, when snowshoeing across a frozen lake, I came across tracks in the snow which mystified me and reduced my companion, a French-Canadian dog-skinner, to a state of gibbering terror.

The tracks, somewhat oval in shape, looked at first glance as though they had been made by snowshoes of the 'bear-paw' type, except that they had two toe-like impressions sticking out from the main print, and ran in an almost straight single line. Their most unusual feature, however, apart from their great size, was the distance between each imprint - more than the length of a tall man. What sort of creature, I asked myself, could have been responsible for such giant strides?

My companion was only too willing to enlighten me. Crossing himself and praying in voluble French, he interspersed his supplications with remarks about the 'Windygo', insisting that we get back to camp without delay.

Of course, I knew all about the Wendigo. He is the dread monster of the Canadian wilderness. In the far North-West of Canada the Dog-rib Indians call him the 'Weetinoe', and among the Montagnais Indians of the Mistassini region he is known as the 'Ate-cheme'. In Britain he would be called simply the 'Abominable Snowman'.

I examined the tracks more closely. To me they were completely inexplicable, and I will admit I was somewhat disturbed as I gave in to my companion's pleading and continued towards camp.

Next morning we found that our dog-skinner, together with the French-Canadian cook, had deserted down-country, and I shall always remember that first encounter with Wendigo tracks because of the inconvenience these departures caused us. But the winter survey went on, and the incident had almost faded from my mind when, a few weeks later, I again had occasion to cross the same lake, this time alone.

It was a day of brilliant sunshine, with the white expanse of the snow-covered lake gleaming brightly in the frosty air. All the world was silent and still, except for the crunching of my raquettes in the deep snow. A few small scatterings of cloud suggested that a fair breeze might be blowing upstairs, although nothing of this could be felt at ground-level. I was within half a mile of the shore when I saw the mysterious tracks for a second time - on this occasion, while they were actually being made. There on the flawless, smooth white of the snow a whole succession of tracks in line astern were appearing miraculously before my eyes. No sign of life anywhere, no movement even, other than the drifting clouds overhead and those tracks springing suddenly into being as they came inexorably towards me.

I stood stock-still, filled with reasonless panic. The tracks were being made within 50 yards of me - 20 - 10 - then, smack! I shouted aloud as a large blob of water struck me full in the face. I swung around, brushing the moisture from my eyes, and saw the tracks continuing across the lake.

In that moment I knew that the Wendigo, Abominable Snowman, *Bodach Mor*, or what have you, was for ever explained, so far as I was concerned. Some freakish current of warm air, coming into contact with the very low temperature, had set up condensation which was projected earthwards in the form of water-blobs. When these landed in the snow, they left tracks like those of some fabulous animal. This time they were a little smaller than those I had seen on the previous occasion, nor were the prints so far apart, but in form they were pretty much the same.

Since then, on a few rare occasions, I have encountered what I call 'blob-tracks' in the Arctic and other parts of the world. I even saw them in the High Weald of Kent during the severe winter of 1939. And this very year I found them here on my own doorstep, in Strathspey. In shape and size they have not always been uniform, varying from the bilobal to tracks which looked as though they had been made by a gigantic rabbit or mole.

It is an uncongenial task extracting the wonder from old beliefs and tales, nevertheless the natural reason for them can also prove of interest and should not be withheld

so long as the debunking is based on a sound premise.

Water-blobs can perform every trick accredited to the Abominable Snowman. They can leave their tracks over the roofs of houses, leap high walls, or cross ravines. They are, in other words, a matter for study by the meteorologist rather than by the zoologist or demonologist, and are only encountered in conditions of low air temperature.

If I am wrong, there is but one alternative. Those latest tracks I found *must* have been made by the *Bodach Mor*.

Document 41

Manchester Guardian,
16 March 1955

MISCELLANY "The Devil's Footprints"

The story of "The Devil's Footprints" is still current in these parts (writes an Exmouth reader), although no one has mentioned it to me personally during the last 10 years or so. No one ever produced a rational explanation of these marks, which were of a cloven hoof and which went up and over the roofs of houses where these lay in the path of the line [19]. They were reported to have started somewhere in Dawlish, whence they went over the sandy peninsula known as the Warren, crossed the river to Exmouth, and ended up somewhere in the region of East Budleigh.

I have heard tell of a man who tried to frighten his neighbours some time after this happening by climbing to the skylight of his house after a snowfall with a goat's foot on the end of a long pole.

Document 42

Manchester Guardian,
22 March 1955

MISCELLANY The Devil's Footprints

In "Miscellany's" notes about the mysterious footmarks which appeared in the snow one night in the region of the River Exe a

hundred years ago it was said that no satisfactory explanation has been produced. I suggest (writes "P.J.") that the marks could only have been made by the trailing rope of a balloon. The rope, probably with a grapnel attached, would leave a mark in the snow on descending to earth; then, released of the weight of the rope, the balloon would rise and continue on its way for a few yards before again descending and repeating the process. The marks were in a single file; they were found on rooftops and other inaccessible places; they took a very erratic course and crossed a river estuary two miles wide. In all probability the balloon eventually floated out to sea, unless, of course, the whole affair was a superb practical joke. [20]

Document 43

ANIMAL LEGENDS by Maurice
Burton pp.197-207 (London
1955)

PROBLEM PRINTS IN THE SNOW

Certain things make me feel I am in touch with something more vast than the world of men. Hoist's "Music of the Planets" is one; but that may be auto-suggestion springing from the composer's title. This same feeling, induced also when gazing into a dear, starlit sky, comes to me from hearing certain passages in Vaughan Williams' "London Symphony", but I would hesitate to attribute this last to any influence the title may exert. The sight of a beech wood on a clear sunlit morning in October, a red sunset at sea, church bells on New Year's Eve, carol singers - in the distance - on a frosty night, and the picture conjured up in my mind by the story of the footprints in the Devon snow, all have this mystic quality. It is easy, therefore, to sympathise with the Devonians who, nearly a century ago, were afraid to leave their houses. If the tracks in the snow had appeared at Christmas instead of in early February, their mystical quality would have been enhanced, but they would have permitted of a more easy explanation, except that a reindeer does not have a hoof like a donkey.

In spite of this quasi-poetic start, it is my purpose to deal prosaically with animal

tracks, in the snow or mud, as the case may be. Before doing so, it is fitting to recall briefly the Devon affair. In the past few months I have asked a number of people for details, but whereas all knew the story, all were very uncertain on its finer points.

The first report was in *The Times* for February, 1855. Heavy snow had fallen on the preceding Thursday night in the Exeter area. In the morning a vast number of prints, as of donkey shoes, were found in the snow, with a mound in the centre where the frog should be. Each print was directly in advance of the other, at regular intervals of 8 ins. They went from Topsham to Lympstone, Teignmouth and Dawlish. They ended abruptly on one side of the estuary of the Exe and started again on the Exmouth side, two miles across water from where they had left off. They went across fields and gardens, along the tops of flat walls, over roofs, over haystacks. They were seen in courtyards surrounded by high walls or high fences. They would go up to a 14 ft. wall, and start again on the other side, as if whatever had made them had gone straight through the wall. In places, they went up to the door of a house and backed away again, but for the rest the line of advance was straight. According to *The Times*, each print measured 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. According to *The Illustrated London News* of February 24 of the same year, they measured 4 by 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. The line of tracks started suddenly and ended abruptly.

I have no intention of attempting an explanation, for two very good reasons: that I have none to offer, and that I should be sorry to see the mystery solved, just as I would prefer not to analyse too closely Hoist's "Music of the Planets", or any other of the things I have mentioned. But snow, for me, is an opportunity to study animal tracks, and animal tracks are, for me, even now, more of a mystery than otherwise.

Chard wrote a book, lavishly illustrated, entitled *Animal Tracks*, in which he surveyed the marks made in the ground by British mammals. It is an excellent survey. It shows the different impressions left by each animal walking, trotting, running and galloping. In it, we learn, too, that the tracks of a young animal register more accurately than those of an old animal; that a female tends to walk in a

less direct line than a male; and other basic principles. What we cannot learn, and the book cannot possibly give, are all the abnormal tracks, the evidence of unusual tricks of behaviour, often combined with unusual conditions of the ground. These can only be learned by long experience and, what is more important, by linking them with what is already known of the animal itself. We are told of the remarkable way an experienced tracker will deduce from its tracks the age and sex of the animal that has passed by, how long ago since it passed, whether it was tired or well-fed and so on. From my limited experience I suspect the tracker, consciously or unconsciously, used much more than appearance of the tracks. There are such things as scats, a knowledge of the weather during the preceding days, the appearance of the surrounding vegetation, even the smell of the beast left on the trail. Moreover, a tracker can do these, to us, wonderful things, only for the beasts with which he is fully familiar. Give him a drawing or photograph of the tracks of the animals with which he is not familiar, and it is by no means certain that he would show quite the same skill. With only pictures of the tracks of some animals he had never seen, he would be as mystified as any one of us.

Over and above this there are freak tracks. For example, we found, on a patch of mud in an opening between two meadows, a few tracks that looked exactly like those of a small deer. There was no possibility that they could have been deer, and sheep and pigs were even more unlikely. After close scrutiny we came to the conclusion that they were made by the fore-paws of rabbits or hares, running at full speed, so that all other tracks were on grass-covered firm ground. A more mystifying set of prints were those found on the roof of a shed recently during a period of intense hoar frost. At least they would have been mystifying had we not seen our cat sitting there earlier on. Or, again, a weasel crossing a muddy road in front of me a few months ago, suddenly leaping in the air, in a curve that carried him fully 3 ft. on to a grass slope. The recognisable weasel tracks ended abruptly, where the animal, a few inches long in the body, had taken its surprising leap. Had I not seen the leap take place, I might have presumed from the tracks that a hawk had

swooped and carried off the weasel...

[Discussion of alleged Yeti footprints omitted]

The phenomenon of the devil's hoof-marks appears not to have been confined to Devon. I have had a few reports of similar occurrences in other parts of the country, but because these reports are at second-hand and not very fully documented nothing more will be said of them here. They are, however, sufficient to suggest that the devil's hoof-marks may have occurred in England on more than one occasion but the trails, not having the length of the Devon phenomenon, aroused little interest. They add interest, on the other hand, to an account published in the *Glasgow Herald* for 11 December, 1951. The writer told how, when "working as a timber cruiser with a winter exploration party (he) was carrying out a strip survey in Northern Quebec." He continues: "One day, when snow-shoeing over a snow-covered lake, I came across tracks which puzzled me and reduced my companion, a French Canadian dog-skinner, to a state of gibbering terror."

[Burton gives a summary of Rennie's Canadian experience. See Document 40]

On 9th February, 1953, this same correspondent returned to his subject again in the *Glasgow Herald*, with the surprising news that he had seen this phenomenon again in Scotland after a lapse of fourteen years. Moreover, he had had the opportunity of photographing the tracks.

[A further summary follows of Rennie's Scottish experience. See Document 40]

Then comes the long arm of coincidence, for this writer continues: "I encountered the second lot of tracks on January 9. On this occasion I was walking through dense woodland and found them in a forest clearing. This time I was unable to fetch a camera before darkness fell, but I managed to make my way back to the locality two days later.

"When I first saw these second tracks they could not have been more than an hour or two old, and were made in deep, soft snow.

During the next twenty-four hours there was some fine, misty rain, followed on the succeeding night and morning by severe frost [21]. This had had the effect of crusting the snow so that while I myself did not sink into it the tracks retained their original depth and were clearly defined.

"These second tracks were slightly smaller than the first, and the distance between each print was shorter - only about 4 ft. 6 in. - but they were of extreme interest in that they bore a remarkable resemblance to the pictures I have seen of Yeti tracks sent back by the Himalayan Reconnaissance Expedition in 1951. They were very definitely bi-lobal and, at a point where they leapt across a sunken roadway for a distance of about 20 ft. the likeness to the published Yeti pictures was most marked."

I have discussed these observations with meteorologists and the consensus of their opinion is that there is no known meteorological phenomenon that could account for the Strathspey trails. One, indeed, said - "It is impossible." As I have suggested, if we take the Himalayan tracks as a separate phenomenon it presents a close parallel to the hedgehog story and its non-acceptance by the experts. If we take devil's hoof-prints, and their alleged repetition elsewhere, the wind-ygo and the Strathspey tracks, there is a closely similar parallel. And all these snow-tracks may be related, a wide-spread phenomenon occurring sporadically and possibly due to the same cause or group of related causes. As with the hedgehog and apples, the rats and the egg and the rest, the experts will have none of it.

Document 44

GREAT WORLD MYSTERIES by
Eric Frank Russell (London
1957) pp.28-45

SATAN'S FOOTPRINTS

In the mid-nineteenth century there occurred a remarkable phenomenon that aroused widespread curiosity, much excitement and a little fear in the British Isles. This was the sudden appearance in the county of Devon of a long trail of mysterious footprints

the like of which no man had seen before. First report of them was given in *The Times*, February 16th 1855, reading as follows :

[See Document 2]

Having said that much, *The Times* lost interest, perhaps thinking it beneath its dignity to have anything to do with the night-time gallivantings of Satan. It gave no more space to the subject. The *Illustrated London News* promptly chipped in by inviting first-hand reports from its readers and was swamped with correspondence. A witness on the spot, signing himself 'South Devon', gave the facts as he saw them:

[See Document 7]

At this stage the astute reader may be ruminating on a couple of contradictions in the preceding accounts. Noting the raised crest of snow in the middle of each print, *The Times* says that the mysterious foot or feet must have been convex. But a convex foot would have left a hollow in the centre of each print. The evidence is that the foot was *concave*. *The Times* also starts off its account by saying that 'there was a very heavy fall of snow'. Just how deep it was depends upon what one calls 'very heavy'. As the man on the spot, Mr. South Devon reports that 'the snow lay very thinly on the ground at the time', so thinly that the prints went right through it and left it looking 'as if cut with a diamond or branded with a hot iron'.

Another writer to the *Illustrated London News* asserted that local labourers, their wives and children, old crones and trembling old men, dreaded to stir out after sunset or to go half a mile into lanes or byways on a call or message, 'under the conviction that this was the Devil's walk, and no other, and that it was wicked to trifle with such a manifest proof of the Great Enemy's immediate presence'.

Yet another correspondent, 'G.M.M.', said that he had personally examined the prints in company of a local clergyman on whose lawn they had appeared:

[See Document 11]

There followed a welter of guesses naming half the living creatures known to the British

scene, each correspondent writing lengthily and sometimes passionately in support of his particular candidate, and each seemingly convinced that the unrecognizable was merely the recognizable somehow made unrecognizable to any but himself. Swans, moorhens, cranes, seagulls, bustards, turkeys and others were offered. Those who scorned the birds and preferred the beasts 'proved' to their own satisfaction that the marks had been made by otters, frogs, polecats, mice, rabbits, hares, badgers and almost everything but tomcats.

One or two backed up the Rev. Mr. Musgrave's theory concerning kangaroos for no other reason than that a Mr. Fische, of Sidmouth, Devon, had in his private menagerie a couple of kangaroos both of which remained firmly caged throughout the entire ruckus. [22]

A certain Thomas Fox, writing in the *Illustrated London News*, March 10th 1855, 'proved' that the prints were caused by a rat jumping repeatedly and landing with all four feet close together to form an impression of single prints. If this were true, the creature had leaped at accurate intervals of eight and a half inches for a total distance of about one hundred miles, hopping up one side of rooftops and down the other, clearing haystacks and fourteen-foot walls *en route*, and managing to teleportate [*sic*] itself across an estuary two miles wide.

Some rat!

Excited and argumentative laymen were silenced when suddenly Authority stepped in and made its pronouncement. This came in the form of a letter to the *Illustrated London News* from Richard Owen, then a famous naturalist whose views were regarded with proper awe.

[See Document 11]

This represents the dogmatic mind in its most pompous mood. From the heights of his allegedly coldly scientific and purely objective wisdom Mr. Owen asserts that his solution is the one and only correct one. And that is in bland disregard of the fact that he never actually observed the phenomena he interprets, whereas those he criticizes had done so at first-hand.

A good deal of intelligent interest in this mystery was taken in modern times by the late Lieutenant-Commander Rupert T. Gould, R.N., a shrewd if somewhat irascible author who devoted much of his time to analysing such puzzles, collecting and overhauling ancient typewriters and - to judge from his many letters to me - gathering odd-shaped scraps of writing paper from heaven alone knows where. In his book *Oddities* he takes a dim view of Owen's opinion, pointing out that in Victorian days people tended to be over-awed by well-known names and had not acquired the modern habit of reaching for the salt. Therefore Owen's statement was accepted without argument by all save those who had failed to see what Owen said they should have seen.

Nowadays, continues Gould a trifle acidly, we know a lot more about scientific dogmatism and a good deal more about Richard Owen. As a naturalist, Owen was esteemed a very great man but, like many such, was not above occasionally making bald assertions in defiance of facts. This weakness became most evident in 1857 during a controversy with Huxley on the subject of *hippocampus major*, Owen assuming the leadership of the anti-Darwinians and advancing the since exploded theory that the adult skull is a modified vertebral joint.

Possibly influenced to some extent by the fact that he was once a naval officer himself, Gould also damns Owen for his 'utterly childish' explanation of the sea-serpent seen by H.M.S. *Daedalus* in 1848; pointing out that the said explanation flatly contradicts the observed facts and postulates that the naval officers who observed them were, 'one and all, half-witted'.

Owen's theory, disguised as an incontrovertible statement of fact, does not stand up under serious examination by anyone with enough gumption not to be influenced by a big name. For an animal of its bulk and build the badger has a fairly wide stance. It is quite true that the prints of its hind-feet may be impressed upon and blend into those of its fore-feet. But not in single line. They form two distinct lines staggered with respect to each other.

And while a badger might conceivably swim an estuary two miles wide, or while one

or more badgers might prowl one side of a broad river while a second group foraged the other side, no badger ever heard of has the agility to mount house-tops, stroll with neat precision across sharply sloping roofs, jump high walls, or surmount haystacks without leaving a print thereon.

The most noteworthy and the most important feature of the whole affair, as detailed by eye-witnesses, is that feelings were stirred across the entire range from curiosity to open alarm, because the prints were *unfamiliar*. They were strange. They were new, unrecognizable, incomprehensible, even to old inhabitants who had lived through many a snowfall in company with all the local lifeforms. Indeed, it was these older ones, who could tell a badger from an ox, who got the biggest scare.

The Times, after apparently deciding to have nothing more to do with the matter, weakened enough to give it small mention in its issue of March 6th 1855.

[See Document 12]

The late Charles Fort, by far the most redoubtable digger-up of peculiar data, also turned his attention to this mystery, and found concomitant items that had escaped Gould's notice. I quote from his omnibus volume, *The Books of Charles Fort*.

[See Document 38]

Since Fort never gained either time or space for the full expression of his ideas concerning these and numberless other more baffling incidents, even in a volume of greater than a thousand pages, it is futile to attempt to summarize his expressions in a page or two of this book. All that may be offered, for the reader's edification, is his satirical comment: 'It is my own acceptance that not less than a thousand one-legged kangaroos, each shod with a very small horseshoe, could have marked that snow in Devonshire.'

Rupert T. Gould also sought elsewhere for similar prints but seems to have found only those discovered on Kerguelen Island, as mentioned on page 27 [of *Great World Mysteries*]. The original account was written up in May 1840, by Captain Sir James Clarke

Ross, when his ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, were lying off Kerguelen.

[See Document 39]

Kerguelen is a large, sparse, sub-antarctic island with little enough flora and fauna. One thing seems fairly certain: whatever hoofed creature was native to the place or 'had cast on shore from some wrecked vessel', it was anything but a badger.

The general agreement in areas so dispersed as Devon, Scotland, Poland and Kerguelen Island is that whatever makes mysterious, single-file tracks is hoofed or has feet the treading-surfaces of which leave hooflike spoor. Witness after witness compares the marks with those of a foal, donkey, pony or ass. Though spread apart in space and time the phenomena have the puzzling aspect of prints left by a junior member of the equine species making short hops on one leg.

On January 10th 1945, when Rundstedt's push through the Ardennes had failed to reach its objectives, snow lay in Belgium at depth varying between two and four feet. And it was there that this writer discovered strange prints very similar to but not identical with those already described. A drawing of the phenomenon, complete with measurements, was used as cover illustration for the fifteenth issue of *Doubt*, the magazine of the Fortean Society. Details published therein enable me to have the peculiar experience of quoting myself. All that is omitted from the following description is the harrowing tale of what I suffered struggling in rubber thigh-boots through that depth of snow.

[See Document 33]

At that time the evidence definitely created the impression of small hoof-marks, though at this date I do not know why I thought of a goat rather than a pony or donkey. There was nothing to show that the hoof was cloven. Possibly my thoughts were influenced by the local multiplicity of goats. All I do know is that I witnessed something baffling and sufficiently like earlier phenomena to be worth noting and recording.

To return to the prints seen in Devon; eye-witnesses confessed themselves mystified not

only by the one-legged appearance of the tracks but also by the way they jumped 'unsurmountable' obstacles. The line of prints, they declared, meandered through or over all sorts of 'inaccessible' places such as rooftops, haystacks and enclosures surrounded by high walls. But had the witnesses seen sparrow-tracks doing the same they would have thought nothing of it. Any bird could do it with no trouble at all. This phase of the matter is mystifying only if it be assumed that the track-maker is an animal.

Some years ago a Shropshire friend of mine followed a single file of bird-prints across the snow in his paddock, through a hedge and into a field where eventually he caught up with a lame jackdaw which was hopping on one foot and fluttering its wings. He took the bird home, tended to it. In the end it became the family pet and something of a household tyrant.

This petty incident, plus consideration of the real 'unsurmountability' of obstacles in Devon, moves me to suppose that the Satanic footprints could have been made only by one or more winged creatures either hoofed or having strong, heavily webbed, concave feet that in given circumstances - such as presence of snow - leave prints deceitfully like those of hoofs. Creatures that waddle as they walk, placing one foot before the other.

If this none too satisfactory theory should happen to be correct it will prove difficult to gain positive identification of the culprit or culprits until such time as it or they may be caught red-handed doing it again. But it would be a mistake to place the blame on life-forms native to the localities in which strange prints have appeared. The quality of this mystery is that the prints are unfamiliar.

Given that some kind of bird is responsible for such tracks, we must accept that it may have been a rare visitor of a kind not yet known to science. One from anywhere in the world, from Poles to Equator, inexplicably transported hundreds or thousands of miles from home.

The mysterious misplacement of living creatures is nothing new. Time and again they have turned up far from natural habitat, appearing as incongruous in their surroundings as would a hyena in the Isle of Man.

Daily Telegraph, July 9th 1938 - TROPICAL

SNAKES IN POND. 'Water snakes of a kind found only in tropical regions have been discovered in a lake covered with lilies and iris in the grounds of the home of Miss A. Bevis, Sarisbury Green, Hampshire.'

A six-year-old bear was shot near Oloron Sainte-Marie, France. Ribbon fish were found hard aground in Scotland and South Africa. Turtles native to the Gulf of Mexico, known as Kemp's Loggerheads, ambled along beaches of the English Channel and Ireland. Nick, a brindle bullterrier, vanished from New Brighton, Cheshire, swam, flew or walked across seventy-five miles of ocean and blandly popped up at Groudle, near Douglas, Isle of Man. It is a wonder he did not encounter an out-of-place hyena there. There is an irresistible theory to explain this dog-feat, namely, that Nick was in league with Old Nick.

Daily Telegraph, June 28th 1938 - AFRICAN TURTLE IN KENT. 'While working on the Royal Military Canal, at Kenardington, Kent, Mr. F. Gill saw a turtle basking in the sun and managed to catch it. Measuring eleven inches from head to tail, it is similar in appearance to a tortoise, but much faster in movement.' The thing was identified as an African mud-turtle.

In 1931, according to the *New York Times*, the police of Mineola, Long Island, mustered their resources and set up a hue and cry after a hairy ape, four feet tall, seen wandering loose by several people. Armed citizens joined the hunt, poked and pried all over the area. Apelike footprints were found, complete with the offset thumb characteristic of the species. This was in June and the pursuit continued unabated into mid-July when several more startled folk reported seeing the creature. No ape was found.

Data of this description can be piled up to formidable proportions but it might be fitting to terminate the subject with the statement that a queer skull was dug up in the Isle of Man. It was sent to the Department of Vertebrate Zoology of Liverpool Museum, where Douglas A. Allan, Ph.D., D.Sc, identified it as the skull of an adult hyena.

The complete unfamiliarity of prints found in Devon and elsewhere points directly to something that had strayed far from home, some creature or creatures whose spoor may have appeared quite commonplace to Naga . headhunters or Eskimos or even the penguins

at the South Pole.

Evidence suggests that the print-maker was bipedal and put one foot directly before the other, leaving a single line of prints. It was winged. And it had splayed, concave feet as perfectly adapted to its own harsh environment as are those of the camel.

It is this writer's suspicion that in the north or south polar regions, or both, lives a rare bird not yet known to science. Like the albatross, it has powerful wings and is capable of long, sustained flights. But like the road-runner of the Great American Desert, it prefers to walk.

Normally, this bird forages through polar wastes, chasing surefootedly across fields of snow, scampering up the rooflike tilts of glaciers, flapping over walls of ice and haystacks of bare rock. Once in a blue moon it is swept far from its usual hunting grounds or is enticed abroad by the spread of snow. Then it lands, mooches around a while - and scares hell out of every decent Christian for miles and miles.

This is all theory, of course, backed by nothing save that it fits the facts. I offer it mostly in the hope that some day ornithologists may discover my bird, give credit where credit is due, and graciously name it 'Russell's snowrunner'.

Document 45

Animals.

Volume 6 Number 8 (20 April 1965)
pp.108-09

The Devil's Hoof-marks

Alfred Leutscher

Readers of *The Times* opening their papers on the morning of 8th February, 1855 [23], must have been startled, or perhaps amused, by the account of a strange happening. The *Illustrated London News* took up this story, and invited eye-witness accounts, and explanations, from its readers. A spate of letters followed, including some vivid descriptions such as this one sent in by 'South Devon':

'When we consider the distance that must have been gone over to leave these marks - I may say in almost every garden, on door-steps, through extensive woods, upon com-

mons, in enclosures and farms, over houses, hayricks, and very high walls (one 14 feet) without displacing the snow - the actual progress must have exceeded a hundred miles. No known animal could have traversed the extent of country in one night, besides having to cross an estuary of the sea two miles wide. Neither does any known animal walk in a line of single footsteps, not even man.'

These tracks became known as the 'Devil's Hoof-marks'. Authorities such as the London Zoo and the Natural History Museum were consulted, but the whole affair remains a mystery to this day. A whole list of animals was suggested, such as the otter, badger, hare, polecat, frog, kangaroo, rat, and various birds. From the size of the tracks, the least likely would be the kangaroo, although some were in the area at the time, on a private estate.

One ingenious suggestion was an escaped balloon which had dragged its mooring ring on the end of a rope. It is a little hard to imagine how it managed to keep at a steady height; bobbing up and down at regular intervals to mark the trail, yet obligingly drifting along the tops of walls, and over houses without waking the inmates.

The insistence in many letters that no animal can walk in a straight line must be challenged. This is precisely what some can do, and in two ways. The cat and fox, for example, have a way of walking in a tight-rope fashion, one foot in front of the other, in a clean 'register': that is, the hind foot placed in the track of the opposite fore foot. The result is a very neat line of tracks. One only has to watch a cat as it walks along a fence top to appreciate its powers of balance. This fits in very well with the Devon trails, except that each individual track would show toeprints instead of the curious 'U-shaped' hoof-marks.

Other trails which are made in a straight line are those of an animal which hops. All four feet land in a bunch, in a leap-frog action, so that the hind tracks are leading. When this happens in a soft medium like snow, especially when it begins to melt, the tracks become blurred and run together. The result is a 'U' or 'V-shaped' impression. Examples of such leap-frog hoppers among British animals are the hare, rabbit, squirrel, rat, and mouse.

The drawing submitted by 'South Devon'

shows a trail of clear hoof prints, each an exact facsimile, as if made by some tiny animal whose feet were shod. Such clear and regular prints seldom occur, since irregularities in the ground or snow cause variations in size and shape. One is tempted to think that the observer in this instance did not draw what he actually saw, but rather what he wanted to see - the hoof-marks of Satan [25]. This is understandable, since a common human failing in most of us is to let a preconceived notion mar our judgement.

Another drawing which I examined, by a correspondent signed 'GMM', has given me a clue to a possible solution to this mystery. It shows a carefully drawn set of tracks, each of irregular shape, and roughly 'V-shaped' in contour. This is precisely what a small hopping animal would produce in snow, and there is only one British animal small enough to fit the Devon trails - the wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*).

It was during a search for snow tracks in Epping Forest, in the severe winter of 1962-3, that I came across dozens of trails of the wood mouse, each consisting of small 'V-shaped' marks regularly spaced out and conforming to the measurements which were given a hundred years ago. When I found them I was totally unaware of their significance (*Animals*, 18th February 1964).

In the intense cold and silence of the forest,

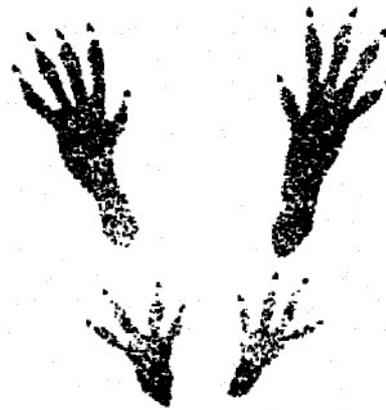


Fig. 10 - Illustration from Alfred Leutscher, 'The Devil's Hoof-marks', in *Animals* (Document 45), showing wood mouse tracks.

what could have been a better setting for the return of the mysterious Devon visitor. In this case, however, the mischievous little rodents were playing the Devil at his own game!

Wood mice are very common in Devon, nocturnal by nature, energetic leapers, and agile climbers [26]. In accepting this earthy little creature, two questions have to be answered. Why did this only occur in Devon and why only on that one occasion? Firstly, snowfall is an uncommon event in South Devon, so that these mouse trails would seldom be noticed. Secondly, once a lead was given that a tiny devil had been abroad, who among the Devon folk would have dared to deny his presence. Everyone knows that 'there are Piskies up to Dartmoor, and tiddn good you zay there bainf. Better let sleeping dogs lie. And what a cheeky little devil it was, for every footstep it took was in a backward direction!

This theory was first expressed in a paper delivered by Mr Leutscher to the Zoological Society of London. [27]

Document 46

IN THE LIFE OF A ROMANY GYPSY by
Manfri Frederick Wood (London,
1973)

THE MULO

In the old days before most of the Romanies became Christians they all believed in mulos, which were Romany dead men before they were finally allowed to the land of the dead. How long they haunted their particular part of the country depended entirely on how wicked they were in their lives. A good Rom that died was never supposed to become a mulo at all but went straight to the land of the shadows. The mulo was supposed to live inside the body of a dead man lying in his grave, but he came out of the tomb every night as the dead man's double and at cock-crow he returned to his grave until high noon when he came out for half an hour. If you got in his path you would have a terrible vengeance on your head - you would commit suicide or commit some terrible crime or if you were a woman, the mulo would rape you and you would give

birth to an idiot child. Some said that the mulo was not a dead man at all but the devil in the guise of a dead man. But whichever way you looked at the mulo they were afraid of him and made a point of stopping at a camping site in time to get out of the mulo's way inside their tents or wagons. So the old gypsies years ago never travelled at noon and were out of sight by dusk.

Whenever a tribe took to religion - that is, when they became Christians - they dropped most of their older beliefs, and anyone who kept on worrying about mulos was in great danger of being turned out of the tribe. So it turns out that most of the pure Romanies in this country no longer bother about mulos and travel at any time of the day or night if they have to, while a good many of the Didekais and Pikies [28] are still very particular about keeping out of the mulo's way. In our family the belief in mulos was a very useful weapon for clearing an area more or less permanently of Pikies. One of the first tricks of this nature occurred well before my time - well before the general use of the motor car in fact. I am not sure about the exact area or even the approximate date when this occurred - but it is a true story as I got it from one of my uncles and it filled the newspapers at the time and caused a great sensation. As far as I can recall, it happened in the county of Somerset.

That night, as everybody in the area found first thing in the morning, the devil walked right across the county of Somerset. Only it wasn't the devil at all but some seven Romany tribes using over 400 sets of measure stilts with size 27 boots at their base. The whole operation took over 18 months to plan out and prepare, and the reason for it was that on a particular stretch that had always been a Romany drom [29] as far back as anyone could remember a lot of Pikies had drifted in and caused a lot of trouble for the Romanies.

Now I don't know exactly how a measure-stilt was constructed, but I do know that it consisted of a pair of step-ladders that could be lengthened or shortened by means of slides and hinges. They were joined on top by a wheel. The bottom of each step-ladder stood in the great big boot and the man operating the stilts stood on one of the ladders and joggled about on it to make as deep a foot impression as possible. Then he would either

swing the second ladder over the top by the wheel - if there was enough head room - or, if there was not enough room, he would raise the ladder by the slide and move it forward by one 'devil's stride'. Either way he got an exact measure of a stride, as the measure-stilts were constructed so they could not over- or under-stride the three yards it was meant to do. [30]

When the second ladder had been shifted to the front, the 'stilt-treader' stepped onto it and shifted the first ladder in front of it again. Then he joggled about on the second ladder to make a deep impression and stepped forward onto the first ladder again - and so he went on without ever stepping off the measure-stilts for the whole operation. This was straightforward enough while striding over open country, except that it was done on a dark night and required skilful balancing all the way - but going over hedges, ditches and country lanes posed a serious problem as people might be using the highways and lanes and see a man working the measure-stilts. So when he worked his way over and along a public right of way he had to throw a sheet over the whole works so that the devil would be seen walking rather than a man with ladders on boots. Walking with that cloak over the top he saw even less of what he was doing than when he walked over the fields.

The devil was supposed to walk right across Somerset in as straight a line as possible [31] - he was not supposed to make any detour around houses or churches or barns and so on, but his footsteps had to go straight up one wall, over the roof and down the other wall. The stilt-treader could not walk up walls - he had to straighten out his stilts to turn them into a long ladder and then make a muddy line [32] of 'devil's strides' with a spare set of 27-size boot-seal impressions; halfway over the top he had to hoist the ladder up and swing it the right way round and without too much noise over to the other side of the building. This was the snaggiest part of the whole business as it required exceptional physical strength and poise. Also, dogs were bound to bark in some of the farm buildings that were being boot-marked and if any of them brought a farmer out of bed the cat would have been out of the bag.

If any man tried to play this trick on his own he would do well if he managed to cover

two miles in one night. It would be quite a feat if he managed to cross two cottages or one village church - but that night the devil walked the breadth of Somerset, because there were seven Romany tribes in this and between them they used well over 400 measure-stilts. The route was planned very carefully and every part of it studied over a period of about 18 months. When the plan was put into operation it went off without a single hitch. After the men got back with their measure-stilts, a party made their way over the devil's trail from each of the camping sights and busied themselves with obliterating the tracks made to and from the devil's strides by the 'stilt-treaders'. The next day the devil's footprints could be clearly seen along the whole route. It put the fear of God into all the locals - but that was not the point of the exercise. For the next few years it kept the area free from Pikies and Didekais who swore blind it was a mulo that had crossed and they were not going to take any chances.

Document 47

Prediction.

March 1981

The Walker on The Wind

by Madeline Montalban

It is strange that so many people with an occult bent seem to prefer to turn their attention to the so-called mysterious East for the inexplicable. Perhaps it is a case of distance lending enchantment to the view; or what is comparatively unknown heightening credence. Whatever the cause, it does seem that the genuine mysteries of one's own country often arouse less interest than those of faraway places.

This is a pity because there have been so many strange occurrences in England alone that they must surely be worthy of further study. For instance, there is one event that seems to be aptly summed up by the well-known quotation: 'Who shall know the mysteries hatched in the depths of the sea, and who shall know the name of the Walker on the Wind?'

This true tale originated in Devon and was vouched for by the people in Lymphstone,

Exmouth, Dawlish and Teignmouth - not forgetting Topsham and lesser-known villages. Most people in agricultural areas rise with the sun and, on one particular snow-bound morning - February 9th, 1855 - the early risers were baffled to see what appeared to be footprints in the snow: all in a straight line, going up the sides of houses and farms, over the roofs and down the other sides of the buildings.

These odd tracks appeared in several towns, and baffled their occupants greatly because two-footed creatures don't normally place their feet exactly in a straight line; neither, of course, do they walk up the side of a house, across the roof and down the other side. Come to that, quadrupeds don't walk in a straight line except for members of the cat family (including domestic ones).

However, there were no reports of missing lions or tigers with a penchant for long-distance walks - and house moggies don't travel in that fashion either! Yet there was no denying the fact that odd footprints did appear in the snow over a distance of more than 100 miles. Each print was about four inches long and nearly three inches wide; the prints were approximately eight inches apart and shaped like hoof-prints.

This latter point was enough, of course, to get the tracks dubbed as 'the Devil's hoof-prints' - though what the Lord of Evil was doing wandering about so aimlessly was never explained. However, these mysterious tracks caused a sufficient sensation at the time for the London *Times* to print a report about them; laying much emphasis on the fact that the tracks did not swerve at all. [33]

The tracks appeared on the top of 14 ft walls; up and over roofs and snow-covered piles of hay; some even appeared on the tops of farm-wagons which had been left out overnight. The footprints were evenly spaced and indented, therefore evidencing no change of speed (which would have altered the depth of the snowy depressions).

This particular mystery has never been satisfactorily explained. Yet every mystery does have some solution, so let us try to find an explanation before labelling the matter as an occult mystery, because a true occultist strives to exclude what cannot be possible before accepting what might be. Firstly then,

we will try to find a solution using simple astrology: bearing in mind that the sign placements of the planets and lights are more important than the house positions when trying to unravel a mystery. Also, it is more than likely that two signs - Scorpio (signifying hidden mysteries) and Pisces (strange events) - are likely to figure largely in any mystery.

Here, then, are the placements of the appropriate planets (without benefit of the rising" sign/of course, as we do not know at what time the^ footprints were made during the dark hours of February 8th and 9th) to the nearest degree, taken from an aged ephemeris which, of course, does not include Pluto. Dawn indicates sunrise and, on February 9th, 1855, this was at 7.27 a.m.

It seems quite feasible to suppose that these mysterious tracks were, in fact, first noticed at that hour as there is no indication in any reports of the incident of anyone being^N wakened during the night. So, at that time the placement of the planets and lights was: Sun at 20° Aquarius; Moon, 9° Scorpio; Neptune, 14° Pisces; Uranus, 12° Taurus; Saturn, 9° Gemini; Jupiter, 12° Aquarius; Mars, 3° Pisces; Venus, 5° Pisces; and Mercury, 5° Pisces.

A pattern begins to emerge: Neptune, Mars, Venus and Mercury were all in Pisces and the Moon in Scorpio, which means that five powers were in Water signs. Also, if one uses the simple but useful mundane map placement (beginning with Aries and ending with Pisces ruling the 12th House), one finds the Scorpio Moon afflicting Uranus - planet of the future and of things new - and in conflict with Jupiter - representing long distance travel - with Uranus and Jupiter also adversely aspected.

This can be interpreted to mean that someone (or something) travelled. Also, as Jupiter was in an Air sign (but a 'friendly' sign), this indicates that whoever, or whatever travelled had no malign intentions. At this same time, the Moon had been in good aspect to Mercury, Mars and Venus; and was about to make a good aspect to Neptune - so, again, there is no indication of any evil intent.

Remember, too, that these four planets (Mercury, Mars, Venus and Neptune) were all occupying Pisces, the sign of mystery and concealment, and the Moon was in the secretive sign of Scorpio. Mercury in Pisces

denotes forgetfulness or muddle, and was near to Mars; Saturn in Gemini can represent a delayed journey when badly aspected with Mercury; also, Saturn rules the metal lead, and was in good aspect to Jupiter in Aquarius.

Further, the Moon was in the House of Secrets and opposing Uranus - ruler of Aquarius - and Aquarius was occupied by the Sun and Jupiter. Jupiter is lord of long-distance travel and the Moon in Scorpio indicates secret travel; Mercury signifies forgetfulness and all those planets occupying Pisces indicate a mystery - so what is the solution? Did something or someone sail overhead (Jupiter and the Sun in an Air sign) and forget (Mercury) something which not only delayed the journey but also involved the metal lead?

Is it possible that someone, through forgetfulness, left a measure-marker outside an aircraft, so that it dangled from its rope and made that mysterious, single track in the snow - up walls and over roofs and haystacks? If so, the Devil can be exonerated from this particular mystery. Or can he? After all, 1855 was certainly not the age of the aeroplane: so we appear to be back at square 1 again ... or are we?

Well, as long ago as the 15th century, Leonardo da Vinci designed an aircraft that could (and did) fly; although, of course, air transport did not start getting seriously under way until the 1900s. But wait, what about the Montgolfiers and their air balloons?

Air balloons (and their ascents and landings) were familiar sights in Victorian London. Little children were taken to see them start their flights from Hyde Park.

The early balloonists must, presumably, have had to make practise flights. And it isn't impossible, I suppose, that an air balloon crossed Devon on a dark and snowy night with its measure-marker out. After all, this could account for those mysterious tracks; that is, of course, if balloonists of that era did undertake night ascents. Alternatively, perhaps a balloonist was blown off course, let the measure-marker down in order to find a safe place to land, then forgot about it.

Either of these alternatives seems to offer at least a *possible* solution to the mystery which would also fit in with the astrological data. The Moon is an indicator of travel and, when

in Scorpio, can be interpreted to signify a 'secret' trip. Jupiter, lord of long-distance travel, was in Aquarius, one of the Air signs, with Saturn afflicting Jupiter (denoting a delayed journey). Saturn was in Gemini (another Air sign) and afflicting Mercury, another planet of travel. Mercury in Pisces suggests forgetfulness leading to delay, muddle and mystery. And, finally, the Moon, Jupiter and Uranus were all in mutually bad aspect - suggesting a troubled, secret air journey.

So, did early balloonists make the Devil's footprints?

Trying to solve ancient mysteries by using simple astrology can be a fascinating pastime ... so let's just leave it at that.

Document 48

INFO Journal.

October 1982

The Devil'd Hoof-marks

A Possible Solution

by Raymond D. Manners

The mystery of the Devil's Hoof-Marks has been written about many times with explanations varying from extraterrestrials to wood mice. We appear to be no further toward a solution of this enduring mystery than were the naturalists and others who wrote to the papers in 1855. It is time for a re-examination of the evidence, to throw away all the previous theories, and to examine the possibility that the Devil's Hoof-Marks were not formed by a strange and unknown animal, but by men. In fact, by tribes of Romany gypsies.

The basic details of the event as recorded by newspapers of the time are repeated here for the benefit of those who are not completely familiar with the details of that snowy night in Devonshire a hundred and twenty-seven years ago.

The London *Times* for February 8, 1855, reported the following extraordinary occurrence:

[See Document 2]

A further report appeared in the *Times* for

March 6th, 1855:

[See Document 12]

Additional discussion appeared in the pages of the *Illustrated London News*. The following is taken from the issue of February 24th, 1855:

[See Document 7]

In the issue of March 3rd, 1855, the following details were provided by a correspondent signing himself as G.M.M.:

[See Document 11]

Naturally people were not slow in coming forward with explanations. The famous naturalist Richard Owen suggested that the tracks were made by a badger. A swan with padded feet was also suggested. Other candidates included otters, leaping rats, a hare running with its legs held together, polecats, frogs, cranes, bustards, and the inevitable kangaroo. As Charles Fort says [34], "My own acceptance is that not less than a thousand one-legged kangaroos, each shod with a very small horseshoe, could have marked that snow of Devonshire".

A thoughtful review of the Devil's Hoof-Marks was provided by that talented and entertaining writer Rupert T. Gould [35]. He concludes his review by writing: "it is possible that there is some quite simple solution of the Devonshire hoof-marks to be found, if one knew where to look for it. But there is a caveat to be entered. If land-animals made the marks, the available data are probably sufficient to enable a competent zoologist, with an unbiased mind, to make a reasonable suggestion as to their identity. But no authority on earth ... can set limits to the number and variety of the creatures which, even though unknown to science, may yet live and move and have their being in the sea."

When we return to *The Book of the Damned* we find that Fort had been much more thorough in uncovering references to the occurrence, and some of these provide important clues that were missed or ignored by Gould. Thus, in *Notes and Queries*, 7-8-508:

[See Document 15]

Impressions of the point of a stick? This is only mentioned by Fort and immediately brings to mind someone balancing on something and occasionally supporting himself or saving himself from falling by thrusting the end of the balance pole in the ground. Is it remotely possible that the Devil's Hoof-Marks could have been made by someone balancing on a pair of stilts with the foot pads shaped like a donkey's hoof?

Consider the facts:

1. The tracks extended for at least a hundred miles and were made in the course of a single night.
2. The only marks were the tracks and the impressions of the point of a stick. There were no marks of any other kind.
3. There were no unusual noises during the night; no dogs barked and no one saw or heard anything unusual.
4. All the marks were apparently identical in size and were regularly spaced about eight-and-a-half inches apart.
5. The prints continued over the roofs of some houses and apparently went straight through objects such as walls and haystacks, appearing on the other side.
6. The prints stopped at the estuary of the River Exe, continuing in the same straight line on the other side (some two miles across the water).

The above facts, taken singly or together, mitigate against the prints having been made by someone on stilts. In addition to making many thousands of eight-and-a-half inch steps over a distance of in excess of a hundred miles, the person would have had to swim across the estuary carrying the stilts and continue making the prints on the other side. Swimming across two miles of open water in the dark in a snowstorm is no mean feat in itself, but carrying a pair of stilts as well - and walking on those stilts for over a hundred miles - would require a superman. No wonder those people of Devonshire in 1855 thought it was the Devil!

But now we come to a story submitted to INFO several years ago by Raleigh M. Roark, and extracted from the book *In the Life of a Romany Gypsy* by Manfri Frederick Wood.

[See Document 46]

Now this story is placed at an undefinable date in an area of Somerset. But surely this is exactly what happened that snowy night in Devonshire? Not one man on stilts but literally hundreds!

We can well imagine the gypsy tribes planning this operation for several months, taking careful notes of the exact track they were to follow while engaged in selling clothes pins from door to door in the towns. They would be certain to note the presence of dogs, ditches, haystacks, fences, and houses that could be easily surmounted. Perhaps they would have erected sighting marks in open country, or across the estuary of the River Exe, or perhaps they would have simply stationed men with lanterns as guides in the open countryside.

But the most difficult aspect of the story is the measure stilts. And in Devon, the prints were not spaced three yards apart but 8% inches! A pair of step ladders attached to a wheel at the top with an 8 1/2 inch stride, with one leg being swung over the other at every step would require incredible skill to operate. A unicycle would be child's play by comparison. Whatever the construction of the stilts, some accessory means of balancing such as a pole would have been necessary. If the measure stilts used in Devonshire were simply normal stilts with a restricting linkage between the two legs, the treader would still have been required to walk in a straight line. However, we do know from the above story that they probably spent over a year in making the measure stilts, and a good part of this time was probably spent by the men of the tribe in becoming proficient in their use. Naturally, each treader would have carried a spare hoof-mark to make the impressions on the roofs of houses, in culverts, under hedges,

etc.

If we assume that 400 pairs of stilts were used in Devon, then each treader had to cover about 1/2 mile of ground. No-one had to swim across the estuary of the Exe, the line of prints was simply picked up by Romanies on the other side, commencing from a pre-arranged point [36]. It is conceivable that the entire operation was completed in a couple of hours, including brushing away the tracks of the treaders as they approached and left their line of prints. This would possibly have been the job of the women and older men, who were probably also employed to keep the dogs quiet. The entire operation does not appear to be difficult for the determined yet secretive Romanies who had well over a year to prepare for it.

Some credence can also be given to the measure stilt theory for the simple reason that gypsies are traditionally uncommunicative with non-gypsies and extremely close mouthed regarding their private affairs. If any word of the intended operation had got out either before or after the event, the element of superstitious fear that they planned to impart in the Didikais and Pikies would have been lost. And by maintaining secrecy, they were free to use the same strategy another time in another place. No doubt the hundreds of sets of measure stilts were broken up for clothes line poles and clothes pegs and sold in the same towns and villages where the inhabitants firmly believed that they had been visited by the very Devil himself!

As Gould said, "...it is possible that there is some quite simple solution of the Devonshire hoof-marks to be found, if one knew where to look for it." The solution outlined above is certainly more credible than jumping wood mice or one-legged kangaroos!

NOTES TO ESSAYS AND THEORIES

1 - Fort was unaware that claw marks were also mentioned by the Reverend Ellacombe in his papers [see Document 231. They were identified as "feathers" of snow, so - while it may well be that the marks were real - Fort was probably right to suggest

they were seized on by the superstitious.

2 - Lymptone.

3 - Exe.

4 - See Document 35 for a similar

anomaly of snow displacement.

5 - Canticles ii.12 [Footnote by Gould]

6 - He signed himself 'G.M.M.' [Illustrated London News, 3.3.1855. [Gould] See section one, note 35.

[Ed].

7 - Amazing to say.

8 - His letter to the *ILN* on the subject was considered (3.III.1885) but not printed. So he published a small pamphlet - *The Swan with the Silver Collar* (Wells, *Journal Office*, 1855, price 2d.) - of which I possess a copy. [Gould]

9 - Next in line.

10 - Mr Musgrave's letter, already quoted, indicates one or two exceptions. He might also have instanced the camel. [Gould]

11 - See Document 11.

12 - I am indebted to Mr. H.V. Garner for drawing my attention to this point. [Gould] The same objection, incidentally, does not appear to apply to the theory that Romany gypsy 'stilt treaders' were responsible for the trails. Well over 400 gypsies were said to have been involved, manipulating clumsy 'measure stilts'; assuming 500 Romanies were present, their rate of progress would have had to be from 43-56 steps per hour, depending upon whether the trail was a mere 40 miles long or, as Gould postulates, 30% longer. If the trail was 100 miles long, the progress would have had to be a more impressive 108 steps per hour, or 1.8 steps per minute. All these calculations, of course, assume a more-or-less continuous trail, whereas there may well have been very considerable gaps. [Ed.]

13 - But see the section "Other Mystery Footprints", the evidence in which suggests that the phenomenon may not be as rare as Gould thought.

14 - But for this, and the fact that the hoof-marks were found on walls and roofs, a candidate whose qualifications were not put forward at any time - the

common rabbit - would seem as good a claimant as any. In snow of a certain depth, a leaping rabbit *does* leave a track not unlike a series of hoof-marks. But it is clear, from "South Devon's" letter, that he saw, and examined, rabbit tracks made at the same time as the hoof-marks, and did not associate the two. [Gould]

15 - These ships were later themselves the subject of a famous mystery, written up by Gould in the same volume as his essay on the Devil's Hoofmarks. Having been made available to Sir John Franklin's disastrous naval expedition in search of the North-West Passage, and having apparently vanished along with both their crews, they were reportedly seen stranded upon a giant iceberg spotted off the Canadian coast. See "The Ships Seen on the Ice" in *Oddities*.

16 - Dr. R. McCormick, R.N., who was supposed to be the official zoologist (and geologist) of Ross's expedition, does not refer to these marks in the account of the voyage given in his *Voyages of Discovery in the Arctic and Antarctic Seas, and Round the World* (London, 1884). It is probable, however, that he never saw them himself (his journal at Kerguelen is mostly devoted to a trivial and querulous account of his teal-shooting expeditions); and he was not the man to give prominence to the work of others. His book, also, was published forty years after the voyage. [Gould]

17 - It was not, obviously, a common denizen either of the British Isles or of Kerguelen; localities whose climates are respectively temperate and sub-Polar. [Gould]

18 - Better known to Fortean as the Big Grey Man of Ben MacDhui. See Affleck Grey, *The Big Grey Man of Ben MacDhui* (Aberdeen, 1970).

19 - It is interesting to note how the passage of time has changed the original meandering wander of the tracks to a more single-mindedly diabolical single line.

20 - The "balloon theory" is hard put to explain the reported tiny distance between the "hoof marks" as well as the extreme regularity which most observers found the most puzzling thing about them. In addition, one might have expected to find drag marks left by a rope, particularly when the distance from balloon to ground was effectively shortened as the craft passed over a house.

21 - This sounds very like the conditions in Devon on the night and morning of 8-9 February.

22 - This does not appear to have been definitively established.

23 - This reference is incorrect. The correct date is 16 February. See Document 2.

24 - This is a very loose 'quotation' from Document 7.

25 - See the introductory essay for comments on the character and expertise of 'South Devon'.

26 - Nevertheless, the presence of tracks on rooftops would still appear more than a little mysterious.

27 - See *Journal of Zoology* vol.148 (1966) p.383 for a reference to this meeting. Leutscher's paper was not reprinted in the *Journal of Zoology*.

28 - Pagan travelling tribes.

29 - Area of influence.

30 - Note the considerable discrepancies between the Romany tradition and the events reported in 1855: the 'walk' took place in Devon and Dorset, not Somerset; the prints were of small hoofs

rather than giant boots; and the length of stride was generally well under a foot rather than 9 feet. Incidentally, the idea that even the most practised stilt-operator could balance on the two narrow feet of one ladder while swinging another over his head, at one point with that whole ladder at 90° to the vertical, and presumably extending more than six feet ahead of him, seems

improbable.

31 - While suitably diabolical, the idea of a straight march across a county does not accord with the remarkable meanderings actually noted in Devon. See note 19.

32 - This, and the previous description of 'juggling'⁷, suggests there is no Romany tradition that the trail was laid in snow.

33 - This is incorrect. See Document 2.

34 - See Document 38.

35 - See Document 39.

36 - There is in fact no contemporary evidence that anyone established that the prints went up to one shore of the Exe, and began anew on the opposite shore.

A PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

[This is only a partial listing of the material published on the subject of the Devil's Hoofmarks. It does not include the documents cited in the main text, nor has any definitive effort been made to track down all references in the Fortean literature.]

Anon - 'Devil's Hoofmark - By a Mouse?', *The Times* 16 January 1968 [An article on leutscher's woodmouse theory]

Anon - 'Devil's hoof prints', *Western Morning News* 15 February 1982 [A brief summary of the mystery and the main theories]

Anon - 'Devon Case of Devil's Footprints', *Western Morning News* 4 January 1940 [Summary of the 1855 case prompted by a heavy fall of snow in the area.]

Anon - 'Footprints in the Snow', *Western Morning News* 14 August 1937 [Compares the Devil's Hoofmarks to some recently-discovered alleged Yeti prints in the Himalayas.]

Anon - 'The Mysterious Footprints', *Reynolds' Miscellany* 28 April 1855 p216 [A sceptical note based on the Illustrated London News' accounts.]

Anon - 'Mystery of the Devil's Hoofprints', *National Enquirer* 1 April 1986 [An article alleging similar marks had been found in the

US and UK. Includes a distorted account of Mr Wilson's 1950 Devon report and several American stories linking hoofmarks to the occult, based on an interview with Brad Steiger.]

Anon - 'Mystery that Made its Mark', *Express & Echo* (Exeter) 27 February 1986 [Brief newspaper comment on the mystery]

Anon - *The Reverend H.T. Ellacombe*, Devon nd [An 8-page Gestetnered biographical pamphlet available at the parish church of Clyst St George. It includes a section on the Devil's Hoofmarks]

Anon - 'The Riddle of Satan's Spoor', *Black Country Bugle* no 67 (October 1977) [An article about the appearance of hoofmarks in Rowley Regis, near Birmingham, in January 1855]

Anon - 'The Riddle of Satan's Spoor', *Black Country Bugle* no 108 (March 1981) [An article about Elizabeth Brown, landlady of the Lion pub, who saw marks similar to the Devon prints on the wall of her tavern. Refers to another article on the same subject, published by the Bugle in 1978, which may be a mistaken reference to the article noted above]

Anon - 'Still They Puzzle Over This Mystery', *Express & Echo* (Exeter) 28 November 1968 [A brief editorial comment]

Anon - Article in *Wide Awake*,

1855 [While searching an index of Devon oddments, Peter Christie came across a reference to the above article {personal communication}. It has not proved possible to locate a copy of the publication]

Anon - 'A Wonder at Wolverhampton', *Punch* vol 28-29 (1855) pl12 [Mentions the Devil's Hoofmarks in the context of a number of recent wonders, including the apparition of a ghost and a sea serpent sighting]

Arnold, Larry - 'Has the Dover Devil visited South-Central Pennsylvania in March 1978' in *Pursuit* vol 11 No. 3 p121 (1978). [A Fortean investigator photographs a curious track of 'prints', rendered unidentifiable by melting, that cross a snow-covered roof in a rural area.]

Bailey, Steve - 'Was it the Devil Who Left His Calling Card?' *Sunday Independent* 26 February 1978 [Short account based on Michell and Rickard's Phenomena.]

Beadnell, Charles - 'The Marks of Satan', *The Times* 5 August 1937 [A letter, from a Surgeon Rear Admiral, comparing the Devon mystery to 'Yeti' footprints found in the Himalayas]

Brown, Theo - 'Strange Footprints in the Snow Which Baffled South Devon', *Western Morning News* 15 January 1951 [An article

summarising the mystery, based on Brown's early research.]

Brown, Theo - 'Devil's Footprints', *Western Morning News* 8 July 1963 [A letter criticising simplistic versions of the mystery and pointing out the lack of evidence for a uniform and unbroken trail.]

Buckland, Frank - *Logbook of a Fisherman and Zoologist*, London nd, c1870 [Includes an account of the Devon mystery asserting that the tracks were made by a racoon. Sometimes referred to as *Logbook of a Naturalist in the literature.*]

Burton, Maurice - 'Nature Notes', *Daily Telegraph* 2 January 1965 [Discusses Leutscher's wood mouse theory.]

Country Essays [A nineteenth century work which supposedly contains an account of the mystery. It has not been possible to locate a copy.]

Coxhead, J.R.W - *Legends of Devon*, London nd [Includes a chapter on the Devil's Hoofmarks reprinting some contemporary press reports.]

Fate - Article on the Devil's Hoofmarks in August 1952 edition [It has not proved possible to locate a copy of this issue of the magazine.]

Fort, Charles - Notes, *Doubt* vol 25 p391 [Reprints Fort's note of the Cotswold prints.]

Fort, Charles - Notes, *Doubt* vol 27 p421 [Reprints Fort's original notes on the Devil's Hoofmarks.]

Gaddis, Vincent - 'The Devil Walks Again', *INFO Journal* vol 1 no 2 [Draws attention to the Wilson case (document 36)]

Godwin, John - *This Baffling*

World, London 1971 [Includes a good chapter on 'The Devil in Devonshire' giving facsimiles of a number of contemporary press reports.]

Household, G.A. (ed) - *The Devil's Footprints - the Great Devon Mystery of 1855*, Devon Books, Exeter, 1985 [A booklet reprinting contemporary press reports with a brief commentary and some illustrations.]

Kemble, John - *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols London 1849 [Includes mention of a Saxon tale of a miraculous footprint found on Dartmoor.]

Koopman, M. - 'Meteorological Cause', *Prediction* ?July 1981 [Letter commenting on Madeline Montalban's article (Document 47) and mentioning some other printed sources, including Rennie's meteorological hypothesis.]

Lyll, George - 'Did a Laser Create the Devil's Footprints?', *Flying Saucer Review* vol 18 no 1, January/February 1972. [An article suggesting the marks were made by a laser mounted in a UFO.]

McLeod, Penny - 'Did the Devil Walk Again?', *Titbits* 9 February 1980 [Mentions the sea monster theory and alleges that small hooved sea creatures were washed up on Canvey Island, Essex, in 1953 and 1954.]

Michell, John, & Rickard, R.J.M. - 'Unreasonable Footprints' in *Phenomena*, London 1977 pp.76-7. [An essay linking the Devil's Hoofmarks to other mysterious footprints.]

O'Donnell, Elliott - *Strange Sea Mysteries*, London 1926 [Includes a chapter on the hoofmarks, noting their proximity to the sea.]

Price, Harry - *Poltergeist Over England: three centuries of mischievous ghosts*, London 1945 [Suggests the hoofmarks may have been the result of poltergeist activity.]

Reader's Digest - 'When the Devil Walked in Devon', in *Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*, London 1979 p.377 [A short standard retelling.]

Rickard, R.J.M. - 'If You Go Down To The Woods Today in *INFO Journal* No. 13 (May 1974). [Although about British mystery cat reports, it mentions in passing the overnight appearance of large "bear-like" tracks in snow in a garden in Farnborough, Hampshire, on New Year's Eve 1970, with photographs. Among explanations proposed were gull prints enlarged and distorted by melting edges.]

Shoemaker, Michael - 'Devil's Footprints', *Fate* April 1986 [A letter written in response to Gordon Stein's article (below), correcting some errors and adding material to support the meteorological hypothesis.]

Smith, Caron - 'Devilish Deeds Down at Eerie Bridge', *Middlesbrough Evening Gazette*, 26 March 1992 [Notes a tradition that a line of 'Devil's Hoofprints' once passed under Newham Bridge, known locally as 'Devil's Bridge'.]

Stein, Gordon - 'The Devil's Footprints', *Fate* August 1985 [A summary, in a leading American Fortean magazine, of the events of 1855, based on the usual sources.]

Willis, Paul - 'The Devil's Hoofmarks: an unsolved enigma', *INFO Journal* vol 1 no 1 [A summary, with bibliography, drawing attention to Charles Fort's contribution to the mystery.]

THE DEVIL'S HOOFMARKS

Mike Dash

Since the publication of my paper "The Devil's Hoofmarks: source material on the Great Devon Mystery of 1855" in *Fortean Studies* 1,1 have accumulated a small quantity of additional material adding to the information already published without really helping to solve the mystery. This is presented here.

I would encourage any reader who has additional leads, or who knows of references to the Hoofmarks in the secondary literature which did not feature in my preliminary bibliography, to send it to me, care of *Fortean Times*, for incorporation into any further updates.

THE HOOFED SEA-BEASTS OF CANVEY ISLAND

Several authorities, including Rupert Gould, have drawn attention over the years to the possibility that the Devil's Hoofmarks were made by a creature that emerged from the sea.

The main reason for suggesting such a theory seems to be disbelief that any known land animal could have produced a trail as strange as that found in Devon on 8 February 1855. As I attempted to show in my original paper, it is in fact plausible that most of the hoofmarks were made by commonplace animals, including donkeys, cats and wood-mice. Nevertheless, it does seem to be true that all the locations where hoofmarks were reported are within half a mile of either a stream or the sea, and two reports of supposed hoofed sea monsters do exist.

Mention of these reports in the original paper was confined to a comment in the preliminary bibliography, which noted the publication of a story in *Titbits* (9 February 1980) to the effect that small hoofed sea creatures had been washed ashore at Canvey Island in 1953 and 1954. Given the vagueness of the date, and the general unreliability of the source, I was unwilling at the time to spend many hours searching local newspapers for further details of these supposed reports. Some time after the publication of the volume, however, I discovered that issue 4 of Jon Downes' cryptozoological journal *Animals & Men* (January 1995, p.25) had¹ included a brief notice on the subject citing

Frank Edwards' potboiler *Stranger Than Science*, and that the magazine had also appealed for more information on the case in issue 9 (1996), p.38.

The description of the creatures *Animals & Men* had found was strange indeed. They did not sound like fish, having deformed heads, pink or reddish skin like a healthy pig', and, oddest of all, two 'short legs' with 'U-shaped soles'. It was also alleged that at least one of the carcasses had been deliberately burned by scientists who were unable to identify it. (I hasten to add that neither the descriptions nor the allegations were endorsed by the magazine.)

A few days later, and before I had had time to check back to the original sources myself, a new issue arrived (*Animals & Men* No.10, August 1996), featuring a letter by Michael Goss, based on his own researches in the local newspaper archives, which effectively demolished both cases.

Citing the *Southend Standard* of 3 Dec and *Canvey News and Benfleet Recorder* 4 Dec 1953, Goss suggested that in the first case "the strange aquatic creature referred to was almost certainly the angler fish washed ashore at Canvey Island on 29 November 1953." The fish made it onto the front page of the *Recorder*, which noted it was first reported as "a fish with teeth and toes" when it was found by 12-year-old Jacqueline Ward. It weighed 301bs and was more than 2ft long and 15 inches wide. There were two "feet complete with toes" in the middle of its back, which were presumably the rather odd dorsal fins that angler fish have.

The second Canvey monster seems to have been another specimen of the same species. A story about the discovery appeared in the *Canvey & Benfleet Recorder* of 13 Aug 1954. It related that the 'monster' was found by the Reverend Joseph Overs on 10 August. It was described as "four feet long with staring eyes and a large mouth ... on its stomach it had two feet each with five toes". These too appear to have been descriptions of decomposing fins, and the identification of the body as that of an angler fish was confirmed by photographs of the carcasses accompanying the stories.

The general effect of these discoveries is to render it still less likely that a solution to the mystery of the Devil's Hoofmarks may be found at sea.

THE BARRIESDALE MONSTER

Ulrich Magin, *FT's* German correspondent, wrote shortly after the publication of the paper to suggest a possible link between the Hoofmarks and a creature from Scottish folklore known as the Barriesdale Monster, which also allegedly left hoofprints in the snow.

This winged and hooped monster, which is mentioned in McDonald Robertson's *Selected Highland Folktales* (Edinburgh 1961) and Carey Miller's *Dictionary of Monsters and Mysterious Beasts* (London 1974), was said to have three legs - two at the front and one at the rear - to live both on land and in the water, and, when on the former, to hop over fences, streams and walls. It haunted the Barriesdale area of the rugged west coast of the Highlands, near Loch Hourn, and was last seen by a crofter c.1880. *The Scots Magazine* of September 1975 also featured a piece on the Barriesdale mystery, describing the beast as "a weird, pterodactyl-like monster" and a formidable predator which had its lair in the hills of Knoydart. In April 1976 the same magazine ran a follow-up which described the monster's footprints as "not unlike the bottom of a bottle" (i.e., circular) although it noted that an earlier correspondent had described them as 'cloven'. The footprints in question appeared imprinted in snow.

There seems to be no suggestion of what the trail left by such a creature might look like, though' presumably each stride would be marked by three footprints, a pair and a single, in line'abreast. Nevertheless, Magin concludes: "The behaviour agrees with the Devil's footprints in Devon. I should point out that I don't think such a creature exists, but it may be a folktales to explain the 'footprints' phenomenon."

THE 'CONTAGION' THEORY OF JOE NICKELL

Joe Nickell, one of the more research-oriented members of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, published a short article titled "The Devil's

Footprints': solving a classic mystery" in *Skeptical Inquirer* Vol. 20 No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1996) pp.16-18.

Nickell shares the view that the footprints were made by a variety of common animals, but his article suggests that witnesses saw the trails as 'hoofmarks' because they were conditioned to by the general clamour and unease caused by their appearance. He calls this phenomenon 'contagion', a psychological term. The article implicitly suggests that other phenomena may have similar causes.

It seems to me that the reports of the hoofmarks unquestionably were coloured by the general presumption that they were remarkable, mysterious and unprecedented. Nonetheless, the admission does not explain in detail why - even allowing for the unusual conditions prevalent at the time - the Devon tracks caused such a furore and were quite so badly misinterpreted. If, as seems likely, many were made by animals as common as the mouse and cat, one would expect there to have been many more reports of strange hoofmarks over the years than there actually seem to have been.

Devon in 1855 would certainly have been an ideal place to conduct fieldwork of both a cryptozoological and psychological nature, but that opportunity is now well past and with it the chance to do more than make largely unprovable comments about the state of mind of the witnesses to the phenomenon.

ADDITIONS TO THE PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

Drawing on the contributions of Nickell and Magin, it is possible to add the following references - largely from the overseas press - to those given above and to the preliminary bibliography itself as it appeared in *Fortean Studies 1*:

Bennett, Alfred G - *Focus on the Unknown*, London nd (1950s) [*A muddled version of events which dates the hoofmarks to 1825 and suggests they ran from Norfolk to Devon. (It will be remembered that Theo Brown, Devon Ghosts, 1982, drew attention to the tradition that a line of footprints running from Dorset to Lincolnshire appeared c.1855.)*]

Bergier, Jacques - *Le Livre de l'inexplicable*

Editions Albin Michel, France 1974. Reprinted as *El Libro de lo Inexplicable* Barcelona 1974, *Extraterrestrial Intervention: The Evidence*, Signet, NY, 1975 [This book, by the author of *The Morning of the Magicians*, reprints the articles by Vincent Gaddis ('The Devil Walks Again') from *INFO Journal Vol. 1, No. 2*, and Paul Willis ('The Devil's Hoofmarks'), *Info Journal Vol. 1, No. 1.*]

Colby, C.B. - *Strangely Enough*, New York 1971 [An inaccurate account which gives the right date but incorrectly presumes the hoofmarks passed in a direct line across Devon.]

Ebon, Martin - *The World's Greatest Unsolved Mysteries*, New York 1981 [No specific inaccuracies are cited by Nickell, so presumably a standard retelling.]

Edwards, Frank - *Stranger than Science*, New York 1959 [A short chapter in a well-known Fortean pot-boiler.]

Farkas, Viktor - *Unerklärliche Phänomene*, Frankfurt 1988 [Contains a summary based on *Michell & Rickard's Phenomena*.]

Fiebag, Johannes - *Ratsel der Menschheit*,

Luxembourg 1982 [A highly inaccurate summary (also giving the date 1825) in a general belief-oriented work.]

Francis, Di - *Cat Country*, Newton Abbot 1983 [An account suggesting the trail was made by alien big cats loose in the British countryside]

Hoare, Bob - *True Mysteries*, London 1974 [A summary in a book for children, apparently based on Gould.]

Kolosimo, Peter - *El Planeta Incognito*, Barcelona 1985 [A poor work, but unfortunately influential on the continent. Gives the date as 1825 and mentions the possibility of a link with UFOs. Kolosimo prefers to believe the hoofmarks were made by a creature similar to the Loch Ness Monster. The book was originally published in Milan, under the title *II Pianeta Sconosciuto*, during the 1970s.]

Langelaan, George - *Die Unheimlichen Wirklichkeiten*, Munich 1975 [Mentions the Devon prints, the Convey Island monsters, and also a trail found in the Netherlands on 9 January 1913. Langelaan was the author of the novel *The Fly*.]

PARALLEL ARRAYS

Steve Moore

In *Fortean Studies* 1 I drew attention to some apparent parallels between the military formations used by the 3rd century Chinese strategist Chu-ko Liang, and those attributed to the (perhaps legendary) Indian general Drona, whose feats are described in the epic *Mahabharata*. In particular, I noted similarities between Chu-ko Liang's *Pa Chen* or 'Eight Arrays', a formation apparently based on the eight trigrams of the *I Ching* [1], and Drona's 'Circular Array'; and how similar traditions had arisen about both, regarding their impenetrability and the disastrous consequences befalling those who tried to break the formations. Since then, some further material has come my way which, while providing no definitive answers, seems worth gathering

1 - For a lengthy discussion of the *Pa Chen* see: Steve Moore, *The Trigrams of Han*, Aquarian Press, Wellesborough, 1989, pp.144-182.

together as it throws a little further light on the subject.

To begin with, I'll briefly note the appearance of a new, annotated translation, by Moss Roberts, of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [2], the main source for the tale of the *Pa Chen's* impenetrability and the consequences of trying to break it. This, at least, makes the material easily available in English again, but regrettably Roberts provides no meaningful annotations for the passages in question. His translation does, however, improve on that of Brewitt-Taylor [3] insofar as he makes it much

2 - Luo Guanzhong: *Three Kingdoms* (trans: Moss Roberts), Foreign Languages Press/University of California Press, Beijing/Berkeley, 1994, 3 vols. The *Pa Chen* material appears on pp.1002-1003, 1206-1207, 1363-1366.

3 - C.H. Brewitt-Taylor (trans): *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, (1925) rpt Charles E. Tuttle,